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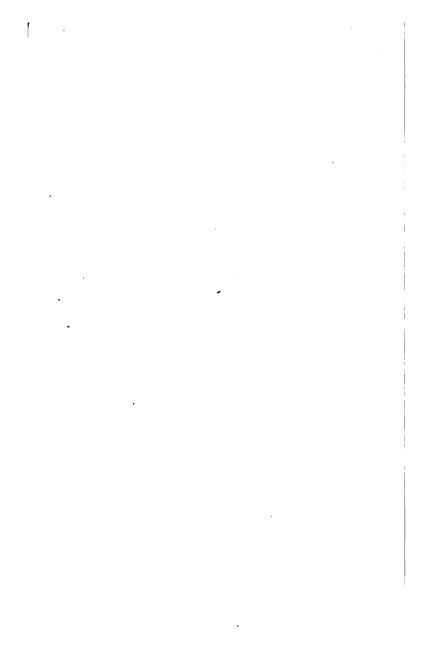
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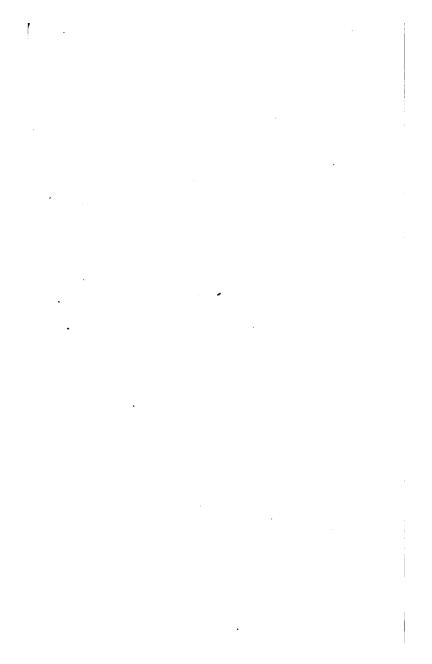
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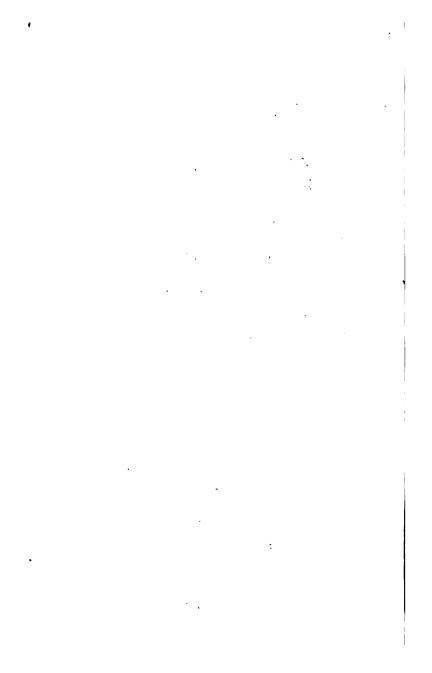
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THE

ART OF CONTENTMENT.

BY

LADY PAKINGTON.

A New Bdition.

BDITED BY

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VICAR OF BROXTED, ESSEX.



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HE treatise which is here reprinted has long been valued by good judges as one of the best practical Christian treatises which our language contains; and many religious persons have borne witness to the comfort they have found in it under severe trials. But it has become scarce,

and is now difficult to be met with in a separate form. It is to be found among the collected works of the author of the Whole Duty of Man; an author whose writings will be treasured by the Christian reader as long as the English language is spoken, and wherever the English Church is known. But as these collected works, from their great bulk, are not accessible to the generality of readers, and they are not all of equal merit, selection has been made of one well-approved treatise, which seems to offer a kind of religious advice best suited for these times.

The name of Dorothy, Lady Pakington, is now prefixed for the first time; because it is presumed that the evidence ascribing it to that excellent person is sufficiently strong to warrant the appearance of her name in the title-page. It is certainly one of the most remarkable cases in the history of letters, that the name of the author of a series of treatises so popular should have remained so effectually concealed. Never were so many anonymous writings published with a design so pure. The opinion, however, which assigns them to Lady Pakington is not of any recent origin; it has been handed down from the time of the first appearance of these writings; it has lately become more general, and it is confirmed by private tradition, as well as some public testimonies.

It is well known that the house of Sir John Pakington, Bart., Westwood, in the county of Worcester, was a place of refuge in the time of Cromwell's usurpation to many eminent sufferers of the King's party, and especially to that pattern of Christian constancy and primitive zeal for the truth, Dr. Henry Hammond, whose life and writings remain

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for the instruction of all ages that have come after. Here that great and good man was cherished for the last ten years of his life by the worthy owner of the mansion and his pious lady; and here, just before the restoration of the royal family, according to his own heart's prayer, he peacefully resigned his soul to his Maker, April 25, 1660.

It was known at the first appearance of these treatises, that the author was a friend of Hammond; and this is almost the only fact concerning the author, which can be said to have been certainly known. Lady Pakington's warm regard for her distinguished guest was such as to give her the best of all possible titles to be called his friend: it is instanced in other particulars mentioned in Bishop Fell's *Life of Hammond*, and more especially by the following impressive and affecting anecdote:

"There was one Houseman, a weaver by trade, but by weakness disabled too much to follow that or any other employment, who was an extreme favourite of Dr. Hammond's. Him he used with a most affectionate freedom, gave him several of his books, and examined his progress in them, invited him, nay, importuned him still, to come for whatever he needed, and at his death left him ten pounds as a legacy. A

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little time before his death, he and the Lady Pakington being walking, Houseman happened to come by; to whom, after the Doctor had talked a while in his usual friendly manner, he let him pass; yet soon after called him back with these words: 'Houseman, if it should please God that I should be taken from this place, let me make a bargain between my lady and you, that you be sure to come to her with the same freedom you would to me for any thing you want.' And so with a most tender kindness gave him his benediction. Then turning to the lady, he said, 'Will you not think it strange I should be more affected at parting from Houseman than from you?'"¹

It cannot be surprising that one whose Christian benevolence and discernment were thus appreciated by Hammond, should have been, as Fell relates of her, a person who delighted much in the attractive discourses of her guest, and who could imbibe their spirit. It has long been handed down and confidently received as a family tradition, and there is a small apartment in the top of the house at Westwood, which has always been pointed out as the room in which Lady Pakington, with the assistance

' Fell's Life of Hammond, ed. 1661. p. 162, 3.

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of Dr. Hammond and Bishop Fell, arranged that excellent work, *The Whole Duty of Man.*¹

Lady Pakington was the daughter of Thomas. Lord Coventry, keeper of the great seal of England for the first sixteen years of the reign of Charles I.; a man, as Clarendon testifies, of great abilities and the strictest integrity, whose death, in 1640, at the beginning of the Long Parliament, was looked upon as a singular misfortune to the King's cause. She was married to Sir John Pakington, a loyal and upright adherent to the same party, who, after the loss of 40,000% expended in defence of his sovereign, and having been tried for his life under the government of the usurpers, lived to be returned member of parliament for his native county of Worcester in the first parliament which assembled upon the restoration. The attachment of Sir John Pakington to the suffering Church had been well proved in the days of her trial; as it appears that a friendly correspondence was constantly kept up between the house at Westwood and the loyal divines who were numbered among Hammond's friends, particularly Fell, Allestree, and the good and learned Bishop Sander-

¹ This is stated from information kindly communicated to the editors by John S. Pakington, Esq. of Westwood, M.P. for Droitwich.

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son; and his joy, when the Church and episcopacy were restored, is strongly marked in the annals of the time. When Dr. George Morley, the newly appointed Bishop of Worcester, came, in September 1661, to take possession of his see, "the noble and loval gentleman" rode out to meet him, two miles from the city, at the head of "his gallant troop of volunteers," and so escorted him onwards, till he was joined nearer Worcester by the lord lieutenant and a number of other loyalists, of the magistracy, gentry, and clergy of Worcestershire.' Lady Pakington appears to have lived many years in happy union with her husband; and dying in 1679, was buried near the grave of her friend Dr. Hammond, in the church of Hampton Lovel, the parish-church of Westwood. A memorial of her, inscribed on the monument of her grandson, speaks of her as exemplary for her piety and goodness, and justly reputed the authoress of the Whole Duty of Man.

The other authorities for attributing these writings to Lady Pakington may be briefly enumerated. The learned Dr. Hickes, whose troubled life did not prevent him from rendering the greatest aid to the cause of religion and letters, is said, in his early days,

¹ Letter from Worcester, dated September 14, 1661, in Kennett's Chronicle, p. 535.

to have been acquainted with the family at Westwood, and he speaks as with a personal recollection of the lady of the house, commemorating her virtues, and practical graces of her Christian life. "She had moreover," he says, "an excellent judgment, and a talent of speaking correctly, pertinently, clearly, and gracefully; in which she was so accomplished, particularly in an evenness of style and consistent manner of writing, that she deserved to be called and reputed the author of a book concerning the Duty of Man." To this Ballard adds, in his Memoirs of British Ladies,² that a lady then living assured him that Dr. Hickes had informed her that he had seen the manuscript of the Whole Duty of Man written in her ladyship's own hand, which, from the many erasures, alterations, and interlinings, he was fully satisfied was the very original book. This manuscript is said to have been some time in the possession of Mrs. Evre of Rampton, a daughter of Lady Pakington; it was interlined with corrections by Bishop Fell,³ who seems, from the part he took in these publications, to have been in the author's

¹ Pref. to his Anglo-Saxon and Mœso-Gothic Grammars, prefixed to his Thesaurus.

² Art. Lady Pakington.

³ Nash's Hist. of Worcestershire, vol. i. p. 352. ed. 1761.

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secret. Mrs. Eyre always believed her mother to be the author of this work, and of the *Decay of Christian Piety*; but is said to have expressed herself doubtfully about the Treatises.¹ As, however, Bishop Fell published them all as the works of the same author, there seems no reason to question that the *Art of Contentment*, and the rest, proceeded from the same hand.

Should the general tenour of these works appear too learned to justify the supposition that the author was a lady, it must be borne in mind that female education in the days of Lady Pakington, though less general, went much deeper than in our own. Lady Jane Grey and Ethelreda Cecil had learnt to write and converse in Greek as readily as in English; and in the next century the sister of Sir Philip Sidney, Mary Countess of Pembroke, and Lucy Countess of Bedford, were as much distinguished for their learning as for their beauty and accomplishments.² It was not till a much later age and a more effeminate generation, after the Revolution, that fashionable gentlemen thought it requisite to decry female

¹ Ballard, as above.

² "Lady Pembroke wrote verse with grace and facility: her chief works, however," says William Gifford, "were works of piety, and her virtues went still before her talents." Ben Jonson's beautiful lines on Lucy, Countess of Bedford, "have learning. A lady of talent, who had Sir Norton Knatchbull for her preceptor in youth, and Dr. Hammond, Bishops Fell and Morley, for her friends and correspondents in later life, might well be qualified to speak of books, and write on subjects, which formed no part of a lady's acquirements in the eighteenth century.

The careful and successful concealment of the the further merit," as the same good critic observes, "of being consonant to truth :"

" This morning, timely rapt with holy fire,

I thought to form unto my zealous Muse

What kind of creature I could most desire

To honour, serve, and love; as poets use.

I meant to make her fair, and free, and wise,

Of greatest blood, and yet more good than great;

I meant the day-star should not brighter rise,

Nor lend like influence from his lucent seat :

I meant she should be courteous, facile, sweet,

Hating that solemn vice of greatness, pride;

I meant each softest virtue there should meet,

Fit in that softer bosom to reside.

Only a learned and a manly soul

I purposed her; that should, with even powers, The rock, the spindle, and the sheers control

Of Destiny, and spin her own free hours. Such when I meant to feign, and wish'd to see,

My Muse bade BEDFORD write, and that was she !"

name is in itself the best proof that the motive of this excellent person was the benefit of her fellowcreatures, not the advancement of her own reputation. How much benefit she conferred upon her own generation by a series of treatises so popular, and so well calculated to heal the distempers of the time, by setting forth an orderly, and peaceable, and practical system of religion, "full of mercy and good fruits," in contrast to the bitter disputes and strifes of words, which had set the kingdom in a flame, we cannot now fully appreciate. The sterling English style in which these writings are composed, has attracted the notice of a modern celebrated critical journal, (not otherwise remarkable for its favourable opinion of English sacred literature), in which it is observed, that they contain scarcely a word or phrase which has become superannuated.1 In a very few instances, where the change of time, since the first appearance of this treatise, seems to have left the meaning obscure, a few words of explanation have been added at the foot of the page.

Having thus introduced the treatise and its presumed authoress to the reader's notice, the editor's part might be concluded; but the importance of the subject here treated of, and its seasonableness to ł

¹ Edinburgh Review.

these times, have induced him to subjoin a few reflections of his own.

All must confess contentment to be a Christian duty; but few can deny that it is a duty which Englishmen in this nineteenth century are very apt to forget to cultivate. The reason of this fact is indeed, in some degree, to be found in human nature itself. It is not in the nature of man to be satisfied with what he possesses in this world; and too frequently he will not feel contented, because he cannot feel satisfied. But it is the Christian's duty, it is one of the lessons taught him by heavenly Wisdom, while he owns the insufficiency of earthly goods, to own likewise that these, insufficient as they are in themselves, and scantily as they may have been bestowed upon him, are, notwithstanding, enough: if the servant of God has ever so little of silver and gold, he may be contented with these; if he had ever so much, he could not have been perfectly satisfied with them. The chief inducement to contentment under our present lot, whatever that may be, is the possession of a sure and certain hope of better things in future; whereas one principal cause of a discontented spirit is, the absence of this hope; instead of which, how often is to be found

a vague fretful expectation of some uncertain imaginary good, which, if obtained, must be ere long lost again, -- of the imperfection of which, even whilst it is most eagerly desired, we are painfully conscious. A deep feeling of the unsatisfactory nature of every earthly object of desire has generally prevailed; and even during the gross darkness of heathen ignorance, there has shone forth a glimmering hope of escape from present evils, by which feeble light the minds of men have been cheered and lifted up with joyful thoughts of an approaching day of deliverance. Ever since the fall of Adam, the whole creation has been groaning, as it were, endeavouring to give birth to a better and more satisfying state of things than the present; and nations that have never known nor received the gospel have been earnestly desiring such future blessings as the gospel offers. "And not only they, but ourselves also," who have received the promises of salvation, "even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body,"-the time when we shall be solemnly manifested to be the sons of God. Nor. though contented, can we be satisfied until this time. Blessed already with the first-fruits, we are yet earnestly desiring to gather in the harvest of God's

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mercies; eagerly do we look forwards to the day when our heavenly adoption shall be declared before men and angels, --- when our bodies shall be for ever delivered from sin, and death, and corruption,-from those hateful influences, over which our victory in Christ will not be finally completed until "the trumpet shall sound." Then, indeed, "we shall be changed." Full of intense hope and anxiety respecting this approaching change, we may well remain indifferent to things temporal, considered in themselves; but this is not all, we may well feel contented and thankful in whatever situation God may have here placed us; because we have good reason to believe that situation to be the very one best adapted for us, most fitted to bring about the 'accomplishment of our heart's desire, and secure the completion of that final, that glorious change, to which all our thoughts are directed. Discontent very frequently arises from a feeling of want, rather than of positive suffering. The anticipation of the faithful member of Christ can overpower either of these causes of disturbance. A heart that is fixed upon "all the fulness of God" can afford to forget the temporal want to which it may now be exposed; a soul that is wrapt up in the contemplation of its heavenly inheritance has good cause for undervalu-

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ing "the sufferings of this present time," when they are placed in comparison with "the glory that shall be revealed in us." The sight of that lofty, but not inaccessible height of Christian perfection, which rises up in eternal sunshine before us, is quite sufficient to carry us through the difficulties of the journey, to render us insensible of the privations or evils which it may fall to our lot to encounter by the way. We suffer as weak creatures, children of fallen parents, subject to vanity, brought under bondage to corruption. We shall be glorified as "children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together." And how can any, or all the sorrows and the wants,---the brief sorrows, the mere earthly wants, --- of mortal men be brought at all into comparison with the rejoicing, the endless rejoicing, of the sons of God?

The hope which the Christian possesses is truly called an anchor of the soul; and it is by this hope alone that he can be protected from the continual fluctuation of spirits, the tossings to and fro, the alternations of vehement desire and disappointed expectation, whereby the minds of all who seek for satisfaction in worldly objects are sure to be agitated. In life there is always something wanting to render

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life completely satisfactory. In infancy, the child eagerly desires to escape from that happy state, which is to others an object of envy and regret; he wishes for an increase of bodily powers, for an advancement in mental capacity; blind to the beauty, reckless of the fragrancy, of those flowers by which his early path of existence is adorned,-insensible to the blithe melody which floats sweetly and freshly upon the breath of life's new-born day,-he turns away from the goods he possesses, and his thoughts are fixed upon those he possesses not; little are the delights of childhood valued, but his heart beats high with the future anticipations of the man. And when manhood at length arrives, are human beings at all nearer to the enjoyment of complete satisfaction? Can the flower of our strength, the noon-tide vigour of our day of life, the full perfection (so far as perfection can here be reached) of all our powers, whether of mind or body, can all these advantages suffice to fill up the craving void of our wishes, to satisfy "the earnest expectation of the creature?" Not they. And if these things were otherwise, as complete as they are incomplete, as excellent as they are imperfect, one thing must needs be wanting, which is continuance. What human being, conscious of the presence within him of an immortal soul, could

ever rest entirely satisfied with a strength that must soon decay, with a knowledge that shall speedily fail, a memory that must become weak, a life that must ere long depart, a body, however healthy and vigorous now, which a few, a very few, years will assuredly return, a mere mass of dust and ashes, unto the earth from which it came? In age, there is yet less to satisfy us. If the life that may possibly be measured by years, or even by scores of years, be brief and unsatisfactory, much more so the life which admits of no longer measurement, from season to season, than that of months, weeks, days, or hours. The young person desires what he has not yet; the middle-aged would fain keep or increase what he already possesses; but the old, "if in this world only he has hope," is, indeed, "of all men most miserable;" he fondly, vainly, bitterly regrets that which he has lost-that which, he well knows, is never to be regained. Thus it is that, without reference to any other outward circumstances, every age of life may be shewn to have its peculiar cause of anxiety, every stage of our earthly being its own feeling of unsatisfactoriness. Thus it is that "through fear of death we are all our lifetime subject to bondage."

Numberless are the other causes of want of satis-

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faction in this life, which every age must feel and every person experience. In whatever quarter we may be tempted to "set up our nest on high," as though we could place ourselves above the reach of evil, in that quarter we are almost sure of being, sooner or later, disturbed and disappointed. There is nothing in our condition here at all capable of filling up the desires, and realising the anticipations. of a being originally created after the image of God, and gifted with a living soul. Imperfection is the mark set upon all things below. Now, we were at first made capable of *perfection*, and are still capable, through the Divine mercy, of being restored to our lost inheritance; whence arises in all men an anxious expectation of the future, a positive inability to rest entirely satisfied with what is before us. To these feelings we confess that Christ's followers are not less, nay, are even more, subject than other men. Whilst it is our duty and our wisdom to be contented in the world, it would be a vain and wicked attempt to aim at being contented with the world. And this is a difference always to be borne in mind, forming indeed one grand distinction between those that are and those that are not the servants of Christ. Like our great Example, we must be patient and resigned; we must meekly endure the present state of

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things, although we "love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." Christ was *resigned* and *patient* in the highest degree; but was He *satisfied* with that world in which He condescended to dwell, with the disciples " of little faith," with the city over which He wept, with the hypocrites upon whom He denounced woe, with the murderers for whom He pleaded, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do?"

It may be assumed, then, that contentment will never dwell in a worldly mind, because there is nothing in the objects to which a mind of this description attaches itself that can furnish a foundation for this Christian feeling. But if it is impossible to cultivate a contented spirit whilst we look only at the things that are seen, there can be no cause for surprise at finding this happy spirit but rarely cultivated, since our thoughts are, in the present day, from various causes, more especially liable to be engrossed and bound up in the contemplation of things temporal. To withdraw the heart from the outward objects of sight, and to lift it up to those unseen but far better realities which are the objects of faith alone, should be the unceasing effort of every member of Christ; and one among many happy results of his endeavours will, in all probability, be a

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contented mind : a blessing, without which all others are unavailing, and with which all others are superfluous.

But, I fear, the discontent of the present time springs mainly from the want of another requisite, rarely to be found, yet indispensable to the attainment of true contentment. Before we can enjoy this tranquil happy state of mind, a lesson is to be learned, neither easy nor agreeable to our self-sufficient natures,---the duty of meek submission to authority, whether to God's direct authority, or to the same authority indirectly acting upon us through the instrumentality of those fellow-creatures whom He has thought fit to place over us. In both cases it is our duty to recognise and obey the power by which affairs are disposed; and our so doing will most certainly render us contented under every arrangement of Providence: whereas, if we once give way to a habit of desiring to settle for ourselves what has been already settled for us, then farewell peace, farewell contentment. A rebellious self-sufficient spirit cannot be a contented one; indeed, in this respect it is as sure to produce its own punishment as a meek and obedient disposition is certain of bringing with it its reward. In treating of a subject like that before us, it may seem

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inexpedient even to allude to party-feelings. Christian contentment is a common ground, upon which (at least in theory) all parties may meet; nevertheless, at the hazard of appearing to provoke controversy, a few observations will be here offered, because they contain, it is verily believed, the truth; and that truth seriously reflected upon may, with the Divine blessing; prove useful to those whom it concerns.

Now there are many Englishmen who are avowedly fond of "meddling with those that are," in various ways, "given to change," whether in the Church or state, or, as it frequently happens, in both of these. Persons of this disposition, whatever may be their *private* virtues, are certainly, with regard to public affairs, very far from studying or practising the art of contentment; indeed, dissatisfaction often becomes their bond of union, and thus men are kept together in one party who differ entirely in their future plans, but agree in thinking that great changes are desirable. Too frequently is a total want of submission to authority, a reckless spirit of independence, displayed by such individuals; and with these proud feelings contentment is rarely found to dwell. Many apparent grievances, and some real ones, may freely be owned to exist;

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and yet it by no means follows that separation from the Church, or a perpetual effort to overthrow the established order of things in the state, is hereby justified. Conduct of this kind is more likely to inflame and aggravate than to cure or diminish pre-Imperfect beings must not reckou upon sent evils. having perfect institutions; indeed these, however excellent in themselves, are sure to contract imperfection in the hands of us frail human creatures, for whose benefit they are designed; and a well-ordered mind, without in any degree foregoing its own privilege of judging, or its sober desire of real improvement, will always be disposed to submit to lawful authority, and to feel thankful for the acknowledged benefits, instead of perpetually dwelling upon the supposed grievances, of the established system. This disposition is no enemy to true reform, but it effectually checks wild innovation; for it teaches men, before they move, to consider well whither they are moving, and thoroughly to examine the comparative advantages and disadvantages of the intended change. Under the influence of this feeling, far from seeking after grievances with the keen ardour of one who has a delight in the chase, we shall rather lament them when they come in our way; and while we humbly and constantly pray God to remove those

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blemishes which may disfigure our constitution in Church or state, we shall be quite content to wait His good pleasure; we shall, as private individuals, abstain from "agitating" for the success of our own particular views; we shall be far better occupied in returning thanks for the public blessings already bestowed upon us, and in endeavouring to use these to the most advantage both for ourselves and for others. Let those uneasy restless spirits, who have felt, as many must have felt, the unwholesome effects of the habits of continual change in which they have been living; let those whose tongues are fatigued with murmuring, and their lives wearing away in complaints that are unavailing, only make the experiment of cultivating an humbler frame of mind, and they will soon become more contented with the present state of affairs; nay, there will be more hope of their seeing these really altered for the better. The advocates of reckless change have always been the greatest enemies to improvement; nor would it be less for their own private happiness than for the benefit of their country, if these excited spirits would learn the art of contentment in public matters. Some, it is true, have indulged in angry uneasy feelings, until the very indulgence has afforded them a certain morbid kind of enjoyment; but no really wise

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man, who had once experienced the sweet and tranquil feelings of Christian contentment and Christian submission to lawful authority, would ever wish again to forsake this rest for the soul, in order that he may "speak evil of the things that he understands not."

The same disposition, which will take off the edge of our feelings of public discontent, will also render us easy and contented in private life, always recollecting that it is not for us to question God's appointment, but "to do our duty in that state of life unto which it shall please Him to call us." Indeed, to speak the truth, want of submission to the. Divine will must imply a certain want of faith. If we verily believe the great truths respecting God's government of the world, which are most forcibly brought before as in the following treatise, then we must be contented under all circumstances; and so far as we are deficient in this feeling, do we discover a want of full belief in those truths. God's glory is the first and highest object in the Christian's sight; and if that be our chief aim, we shall be quite contented, so long as that is forwarded and promoted, which may be done, indeed is often best done, under the pressure of earthly trials, and in the midst of evils and troubles : these, accordingly, need not dis-

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turb, ought not to disturb, the peace of mind and contentment of the true believer. Indeed, when we turn to the evidence afforded by experience, where is it that the discontented are to be found? Is it among the zealous, devoted servants of Christ, or among those that know little or nothing beyond the mere name and profession of His holy religion? Is it in the life and conduct of the humble member of Christ's Church, or of the man who "leans upon his own understanding," that we see plainly developed the truth of the apostle's saying, "Godliness with contentment is great gain?"

Our Divine Master requires in us a disregard or indifference respecting worldly matters, and a simple child-like submission to lawful authority; and these two requisites, which form the chief materials of contentment, religion alone can supply. Thus, if contentment is the object of our search, we cannot be successful unless we call in the assistance of religion; but if religion is cultivated duly, contentment will follow in its train. The kingdom of God and his righteousness must, in the first instance, be anxiously sought after; and then, among the other things which will be added unto us, the blessing of a contented spirit will not be the least important or least valuable. The possession of this

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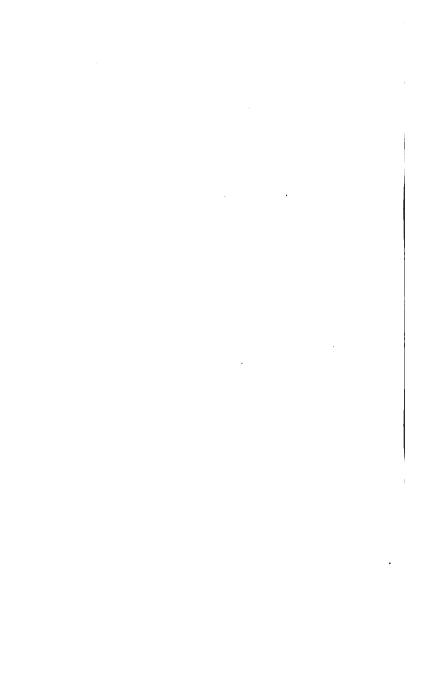
PREFACE.

will soothe the troubles and heighten the enjoyments of our present condition; and when the mind of the believer is turned (as it often will be) towards a future state of more perfect satisfaction, confidently may he take up the words of the Psalmist, and say, "As for me, I will behold Thy presence in righteousness; and when I awake up after Thy likeness, I shall be satisfied with it."

W. PRIDDEN.

Broxted Vicarage, April 1841.





A Prayer

FOR DILIGENCE AND RESIGNATION.

BY LADY PAKINGTON.

[The following prayer was copied from a MS. at Westwood, by a lady, whose name Ballard says he was not at liberty to mention, but whose veracity no one who was acquainted with her would ever call in question. (Ballard's British Ladies, p. 234-5.) By comparing it with other prayers, on the same subjects, in the Whole Duty of Man, the reader may perhaps form a judgment of the probability that they proceeded from one and the same author.]

LORD, I beseech Thee to incline my soul to do and suffer Thy will, whatsoever it is, with that readiness, and courage, and cheerfulness here, with which they that do continually behold Thy face do always execute Thy commands delivered in heaven. For the time that it shall be Thy will that I attend Thy service here below, Lord, shew me the way that I should walk in, that I may not live unprofitably before Thee. Be Thou pleased to employ me as Thy servant, though most unworthy that honour, to bring in some glory to Thy name, some estimation to Thy holy faith whereunto I am called, some advantage to others, especially to those who are near unto me, some improvement in their spiritual eternal state, some fruit to my account, some ground of comfort and rejoicing to my own soul.

Lord, carry me safe, and unmoved, and undefiled, through all the unquiet billows and defilements of this ' life; and in all the exercises of my vigilancy, patience A PRAYER.

and constancy, do Thou continue to watch over me: not to permit me to fall off from them in any part through the deceitfulness of sin, the repeated importunity of the tempter, the empty terrors, or the allurements of the world, or the sloth and treachery of my own soul. Lord, it is Thy restraining grace from which I acknowledge to have received all the degrees of innocence; Thy preventing and assisting, from which I have derived all the strength unto victory over my sin: and be Thou pleased to continue these securities of Thine to me every hour and minute of my life, that under the shadow of Thy wings I may rejoice, that by this armour of Thine I may have truce or victory over all my ghostly enemies.

And then, Lord, for viands of this short travail of mine, for the remainder of it, give me a heart to be satisfied and rejoice in my portion, be it the meanest that Thy wisdom, on the sight of my infirmities, shall see fittest to choose for me. And how long or how short space soever Thou shalt be pleased to continue me here, be pleased also to continue my thirst of Thee; which, without forsaking my station, may anticipate the comfort and joy of beholding Thee; that seeking and savouring of the things above, I may have my fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.



HE desire of happiness is so coessential with our nature, so interwoven and incorporate with it, that nothing but the dissolution of the whole frame can extinguish it. This runs through the whole race of

mankind, and, amidst the infinite variety of other inclinations, preserves itself entire. The most various contradictory tempers do yet conspire in this; and men of the most unequal fortunes are yet equal in their wishes of being happy.

But this concurrence, as to the end, is not more universal than the disagreement about the way. Every man would have happiness; but wherein that consists, or how it is to be attained, has been diversely opined ; indeed the ultimate supreme happiness,

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as it is originally inherent in God, so it is wrapt up in those clouds and darkness which, as the Psalmist says, are "round about him" (Ps. xviii. 11). And we can see nothing of it, but in those gleams and rays he is pleased to dart out upon us; so that all our estimates, as to our final felicity, must be measured by those revelations he has made of it.

But one would think our temporal happiness were as much a mystery as our eternal, to see what variety of blind pursuits are made after it. One man thinks it is seated on the top-pinnacle of honour, and climbs till perhaps he falls headlong. Another thinks it a mineral, that must be dug out of the earth, and toils to "lade himself with thick clay" (Hab. ii. 6), and at last finds a grave, where he sought his treasure. A third supposes it consists in the variety of pleasures, and wearies himself in that pursuit which only cloys and disappoints. Yet every one of these can read you lectures of the gross mistake and folly of the other, whilst himself is equally deluded.

Thus do men chase an imaginary good, till they meet with real evils; herein exposing themselves to the same cheat Laban put upon Jacob,—they serve for Rachel, and are rewarded with Leah; court fancied beauty, and marry loathed deformity. Such delusive felicities as these are the largesses of the prince of the air, who once attempted to have inveigled even Christ himself (Matt. iv.). But God's proposals are more sincere: he knows how sandy, how false a foundation all these external things must make; and therefore warns us not to build so much as our present satisfaction upon them; but shews us a more certain, a more compendious way to acquire what we gasp after, by telling us, that as godliness in respect of the next, so "contentment" for this world "is great gain" (1 Tim. vi. 6). It is indeed the *unum necessarium*, the one point in which all the lines of worldly happiness are concentred; and to complete its excellence, it is to be had at home, nay, indeed, only there. We need not ramble in wild pursuits after it; we may form it within our own breasts: no man wants materials for it, that knows but how to put them together.

And the directing to that skill is the only design of the ensuing tract; which, coming upon so kind an errand, may at least hope for an unprejudiced reception. Contentment is a thing we all profess to aspire to, and therefore it cannot be thought an unfriendly office to endeavour to conduct men to it. How far the ensuing considerations may tend to that end, I must leave to the judgment and experience of the reader; only desiring him that he will weigh them with that seriousness which befits a thing wherein both his happiness and duty are concerned; for in this, as in many other instances, God has so twisted them together, that we cannot be innocently miserxlii

able. The present infelicities of our murmurs and impatiences have an appendent guilt, which will consign us to a more irreversible state of dissatisfaction hereafter.





The Art of Contentment.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE NECESSARY CONNEXION BETWEEN HAPPINESS AND Contentment.



OD, who is essentially happy in himself, can receive no accession to his felicity by the poor contributions of men. He cannot, therefore, be supposed to have made them upon intuition¹ of increasing, but communicating, his happiness. And this, his original design, is very visible in all the parts

of his economy towards them. When lapsed man had counterplotted against himself, defeated the purpose of the Divine goodness, and plunged his whole nature into the opposite state of endless

¹ Intuition, —used commonly of mental view.

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misery, he yet reinforced his first design, and, by an expedient as full of wonder as mercy, the death of his Son, recovers him to his former capacity of bliss. And, that it might not only be a bare capacity, he has added all other methods proper to work upon a rational creature; he has shewed him his danger, set before him in perspective that eternal Tophet which he is advised to shun. On the other side he has no less lively described the heavenly Jerusalem, the celestial country to which he is to aspire : nay, farther, has levelled his road to it; leads him not, as he did the Israelites through the wilderness, through intricate mazes to puzzle his understanding-through "a land of drought, wherein were fiery serpents and scorpions" (Deut. viii. 15), to discourage and affright him,-but has in the Gospel chalked out a plain, a safe, nav, a pleasant path,—as much superior, both in the ease of the way and in the end to which it leads, as heaven is to Canaan.

2. By doing this, he has not only secured our grand and ultimate happiness, but provided for our intermedial also. Those Christian duties which are to carry us to heaven are our refreshments, our viaticum² in our journey; his yoke is not to gall and fret us, but an engine by which we may with ease (and almost insensibly) draw all the clogs and incumbrances of human life. For whether we take Christianity in its whole complex, or in its several

² Viaticum, ---- provision for a journey.

and distinct branches, it is certainly the most excellent, the most compendious art of happy living : its very tasks are rewards, and its precepts are nothing but a divine sort of alchemy, to sublime at once our nature and our pleasures.

3. This may be evidenced in every particular of the evangelical law; but having formerly made some attempt towards it in another tract,³ I shall not here reassume the whole subject; I shall only single out one particular precept wherein happiness is not (as in the others) only implied, and must be catched at the rebound by consequence and event, but is literally expressed, and is the very matter of the duty —I mean the precept of acquiescence and contentment; happiness and this true genuine contentment being terms so convertible, that to bid us be content is but another phrase for bidding us be happy.

4. Temporal enjoyments, such as are pleasure, wealth, honour, and the rest, though they make specious pretences to be the measure of human happiness, are all of them justly discarded by the philosopher in his Ethics, upon this one consideration, that, coming from abroad, they may be withheld or taken from us; and our tenure being precarious, we even for that reason are unhappy in our most desirable possessions, because we are still liable to be so: and therefore he concludes, that felicity must be placed in the mind and soul, which stands without the reach of fortune; and in the practice of ³ Decay of Christian Piety. virtue, which in its own nature, and not in its contingent use, is truly good, and therefore certainly renders the possessors such.

5. But this practice being diffused through the whole extent of moral duty. Epictetus thought he had deserved well of human nature when he drew it up in two short words, to sustain and abstain; that is, to bear with constancy adverse events, and with moderation enjoy those that are prosperous: which complexure of philosophy is yet more fully, as well as more compendiously expressed in the single notion of contentment, which involves the patient bearing of all misadventures, and generous contempt of sensual illectives.⁴ This state of mind the Greeks express by calling it airáoxua, or self-sufficiency. which we know, properly speaking, is one of the incommunicable attributes of the Divine nature : and the Stoics expressly pretend, that by it mortal men are enabled to rival their god - in Seneca's phrase, to make a controversy with Jupiter himself. But abating the insolent blasphemy of an independent felicity, Christianity acknowledges a material truth in the assertion; and St. Paul declares of himself, that, having "learned how to want and how to abound, and in whatever state he happens to be in, therewith to be content, he is able to do all things through Christ that strengthens him" (Phil. iv. 11-13); " and having nothing, to possess all things" (2 Cor. vi. 10).

⁴ Enticements, allurements.

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6. Which great event comes about, not only because all good things are eminently in the Divine nature, and he who by virtue and religion possesses Him, thereby in a full equivalence has every thing, but also upon human measures and the principles of philosophy; the compendious⁵ address to wealth, as Plato rightly observed, being not to increase possessions, but lessen desires; and, if so, it will follow that the contented man must be abundantly provided for, being so entirely satisfied with what he has, as to have no desires at all. Indeed, it is truly said of covetous men, and is equally verified of all who have any desire to gratify, that they want no less what they have than what they have not; but the reverse of that paradox is really made good by contentment, which bestows on men the enjoyment of whatever they have, and also whatever they have not; and, by teaching to want nothing, abundantly secures not to want happiness.

7. On the other side, this one grace being absent, it is not in the power of any success or affluence to make life a tolerable thing. Let all the materials of earthly happiness be amassed together and flung upon one man, they will, without contentment, be but like the fatal prize of Tarpeia's treason, who was pressed to death with the weight of her booty. He that has the elements of felicity, and yet cannot form them into a satisfaction, is more desperately miserable than he that wants them:

⁵ Compendious,---direct.

for he who wants has yet something to hope for, and thinks if he had them, he might be happy; but he who insignificantly⁶ possesses them, has no reserve, has not so much as the flattery of an expectation; for he has nothing left to desire, and yet can be as little said to enjoy.

8. He, therefore, that would have the extract, the quintessence of happiness, must seek it in content: all outward accessions are but the dross and earthy part; this alone is the spirit, which, when it is once separated, depends not upon the fate of the other, but preserves its vigour when that is destroyed. St. Paul, whom I before mentioned, is a ready instance of it, who professes to be " content in whatever state;" contentment being not so inseparately linked to external things but that they may subsist apart. That those are often without it, we are too sure; and that it may be without them is as certainly true, though by our own default we have not so many examples of it. A heart that rightly computes the difference between temporals and eternals, may resolve with the prophet, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation" (Hab. iii. 17, 18). He that has God need not much deplore the want

⁶ Insignificantly,-without importance or effect.

of any thing else; nor can he that considers the plenty and glory of his future state be much dejected with the want or abjectness of his present.

9. Yet so indulgent is God to our infirmities, that, knowing how unapt our impatient natures are to "walk" only "by faith, and not at all by sight" (2 Cor. v. 7), he is pleased to give us fair antepasts⁷ of satisfaction here; dispenses his temporal blessings, though not equally, yet so universally, that he that has least has enough to oblige, not only his acquiescence, but his thankfulness. Though every man has not all he wishes, yet he has that which is more valuable than that he complains to want, nay, which he himself could worse spare, were it put to his option.

10. And now, from such a disposure of things, who would not expect that mankind should be the cheerfulest part of the creation? that the sun should not more "rejoice to run his course" (Ps. xix. 5), than man should to finish his; that a journey which has so blessed an end, and such good accommodation by the way, should be passed with all imaginable alacrity; and that we should live here practisers and learners of that state of unmixed interminable joys to which we aspire. But, alas! if we look upon the universality of men, we shall find it nothing so; but while all other creatures gladsomely follow the order of their creation, take pleasure in those things God has assigned for them, we,

⁷ Antepast,---a foretaste.

with sullen perverseness, quarrel at what we should enjoy, and in every thing make it our business not to fit it for our use, but to find some concealed quality which may render it unfit. We look insidiously upon our blessings; like men that are designed only to pick a quarrel and start a pretence for mutinying. From hence it is that man, who was designed the lord of the world, to whose satisfactions all inferior beings were to contribute, is now the unhappiest of the creatures; nay, as if the whole order of the universe were inverted, he becomes slave to his own vassals, courts all those sublunary things with such passion, that, if they prove coy and fly his embraces, he is mad and desperate; if they fling themselves into his arms, he is then glutted and satiated; like Amnon, "he hates more than he loved" (2 Sam. xiii. 15), and is sicker of his possession than he was of his desire.

11. And thus will it ever be till we keep our desires more at home, and not suffer them to ramble after things without reach. That honest Roman, who from his extraordinary industry upon his little spot of ground received such an increase as brought him under suspicion of witchcraft, is a good example for us. God has placed none of us in so barren a soil, in so forlorn a state, but there is something in it which may afford us comfort; let us husband that to the utmost, and it is scarce imaginable what improvements even he that appears the most miserable may make of his condition. But if in a sullen

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humour we will not cultivate our own field, because we have perhaps more mind to our neighbour's, we may thank ourselves if we starve. The despising of what God has already given us, sure is but cold invitation to farther bounty. Men are indeed forced sometimes to reward the mutinous; but God is not to be so attacked, nor is it that sort of violence which can ever force heaven. The heathen could say that Jupiter sent his plagues among the poorer sort of men because they were always repining; and indeed there is so much truth in the observation, that our impatience and discontent at our present condition is the greatest provocation to God to make it worse.

12. It must, therefore, be resolved to be very contrary to our interest, and surely it is no less to our duty. It is so, if we do but own ourselves men, for in that is implied a subordination and submission to that Power which made us so; and to dispute his management of the world, to make other distributions of it than he has done, is to renounce our subjection, and set up for dominion. But this is yet more intolerable as we are Christians; it being a special part of evangelical discipline cheerfully to conform to any condition, to "know how to be abased and how to abound, to be full and to be hungry" (Phil. iv. 12), " to be careful for nothing" (ver. 6). Nay, so little does Christ give countenance to our peevish discontents, our wanton outcries when we are not hurt, that he requires more

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than a contentment, an exultancy and transport of joy under the heaviest pressures, under reproaches and persecutions; "Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy" (Luke vi. 23). And sure nothing can be more contrary to this than to be always whining and complaining; crying, in the prophet's phrase, "my leanness, my leanness, wo is me" (Is. xxiv. 16); when perhaps Moses' simile does better fit our state, "Jeshurun waxed fat and kicked" (Deut. xxxii. 15).

13. And as this querulous humour is against our interest and duty, so it is visibly against our It is a sickness of the mind, a perpetual ease. gnawing and craving of the appetite, without any possibility of satisfaction; and indeed is the same in the heart which the caninus appetitus⁸ is in the stomach; to which we may aptly enough apply that description we find in the prophet, " he shall snatch on the right hand, and be hungry, and he shall eat on the left, and not be satisfied" (Isaiah ix. 20). Where this sharp, this fretting humour abounds, nothing converts into nourishment --- every new accession does but excite some new desire; and, as it is observed of a trencher-fed dog, that he tastes not one bit for the greedy expectation of the next, so a discontented mind is so intent upon his pursuits, that he has no relish of his acquests.⁹ So that what the prophet speaks of the covetous, is equally applicable to all other sorts of malcontents : " he enlarges

- ⁸ A dog's appetite ; a disease of inordinate hunger.
- ⁹ Acquest,—the thing gained.

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his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied" (Hab. ii. 5). And sure if the "desire accomplished" be, as Solomon says, "sweet to the soul" (Prov. xiii. 19), it must be exceedingly bitter to be thus condemned to endless unaccomplishable desires; and yet this is the torture which every repining, uncontented spirit provides for itself.

14. What a madness is it, then, for men to be so desperately bent against their interest and duty as to renounce even their ease too for company! One would think this age were sensual enough to be at defiance with the least shadow of uneasiness. It is so, I am sure, where it ought not; every thing is laborious when it is in compliance with their duty. A few minutes spent in prayer, "O, what a weariness is it !" (Mal. i. 13.) If they chance but to miss a meal, they are ready to cry out, their "knees are weak through fasting" (Ps. cix. 23); yet they can, without regret or any self-compassion, macerate and cruciate¹⁰ themselves with anxious cares and vexations, and, as the apostle speaks (1 Tim. vi. 10), " pierce themselves through with many sorrows." That proposal, therefore, which was very rashly made by St. Peter to our Saviour, " Master, pity thyself" (Matt. xvi. 12), which we render " be it far from thee," would here be an advised motion to the generality of mankind, who are commonly made unhappy, not by any thing without them, but by those restless impatiences that are within them.

¹⁰ Macerate,---to make lean; cruciate,---to torment.

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15. It may therefore be a seasonable office to endeavour the appeasing these storms, by recalling them to those sober rational considerations, which may shew as well the folly as uneasiness of this repining, unsatisfiable humour. It is certain that in true reasoning we can find nothing whereon to found it, but a great deal to enforce the contrary. Indeed, it is so much against the dictate of reasonable nature to affect damage, sin, and torment, that, were there nothing else to be said but what I have already mentioned, it might competently discover the great unreasonableness of this sin.

16. But we need not confine our appeal to reason, as it is only a judge of utility and advantage, but enlarge it to another notion, as it is judge of equity and right; in which respect also it gives as clear and peremptory a sentence against all murmuring and impatience. To evince this, I shall insist upon these particulars : First, that God is debtor to no man, and therefore whatever he affords to any, it is upon bounty, not of right-a benevolence, not a due. Secondly, that this bounty is not strait or narrow, confined to some few particular persons, and wholly overskipping the rest, but more or less universally diffused to all; so that he who has the least cannot justly say but he has been liberally dealt with. Thirdly, that if we compare our blessings with our allays,¹¹ our good things with our evil, we shall find our good far surmounting. Fourthly,

¹¹ Allay,-abatement, baser metal mixed in coinage.

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that we shall find them yet more so, if we compare them with the good we have done; as, on the contrary, we shall find our afflictions scarce discernible if balanced with our sins. Fifthly, that as God is the rector of the universe, so it appertains to him to make such allotments, such distributions, as may best preserve the state of the whole. Sixthly, that God, notwithstanding that universal care, has also a peculiar aspect on every particular person, and disposes to him what he discerns best for him in spe-Seventhly, if we compare our adversities with cial. those of other men, we shall always find something that equals, if not exceeds, our own. All these are certain irrefragable truths, and there is none of them single but may, if well pressed upon the mind, charm it into a calmness and resignation ; but when there is such a conspiration of arguments, it must be a very obstinate perverseness that can resist them; or, should they fail to enforce a full conviction. will yet introduce those subsidiary proofs which I have to allege so advantageously, as will, being put together, amount unto perfect and uncontrollable evidence.



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CHAPTER II.

OF GOD'S ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY.



HE first proposition, that God is debtor to no man, is too clear and apparent to require much of illustration; for as he is a free agent, and may act

as he pleases, so he is the sole proprietary, and can wrongfully detain from none; because all original right is in himself. This has been so much acknowledged by the blindest heathens, that none of them durst make insolent addresses to their gods, challenge any thing of them as of debt, but by sacrifices and prayers owned their dependence and wants, and implored supplies. And sure Christianity teaches us not to be more saucy. If those deities, who owed their very being to their votaries, were yet acknowledged to be the spring and source of all, we can with no pretence deny it to that Supreme Power in "whom we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts xvii. 28). For if it were merely an act of his choice to give us a being, all his subsequent bounties can have no other original

than his own good pleasure. We could put no obligation upon God before we were; and when we began to be, we were his creatures, and so by the most indisputable right owe ourselves to him, but can have no antecedent title on which to claim any thing from him; so that the apostle might well make the challenge which he doth on God's behalf, "Who hath given any thing unto him, and it shall be recompensed to him again?" (Rom. xi. 35.)

2. Now, ordinary discretion teaches us not to be too bold in our expectation from one to whom we can plead no right. It has as little of prudence as of modesty, to press impudently upon the bounty of a patron, and does but give him temptation, at least pretence, to deny. And if it be thus with men, who possibly may sometimes have an interest, sometimes a vanity, to oblige us, it must be much more so towards God, who cannot be in want of us, and therefore need not buy us: "Our good," as the Psalmist speaks, "extends not to him" (Ps. xvi. 2). He has a fundamental right in that little we are, which will stand good, though it should never be corroborated by greater benefits. With what an humble bashfulness should we then sue for any thing, who have no argument to invite the least donation, being already so pre-engaged, that we cannot mortgage so much as ourselves in consideration of any new favour! And surely extravagant hopes do very ill befit people in this condition. We see the modesty of good Mephibosheth,

who, though he was by a slanderous accusation outed of half the estate David had given him, yet, upon a reflection that he derived it all from his good pleasure, disputed not the sentence, but cheerfully resigned the whole to the same disposure from which he received it, saving, "Yea, let him take all" (2 Sam. xix. 30). A rare example, and fit for imitation, as being adapted to the present case, not only in that one circumstance of his having received all from the king, but also in that of the attainder of his blood, which he confesses in the former part of the verse;¹ for "all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord." And, alas, may we not say the very same? Was not our whole race tainted in our first parent? So that if God had not the primary title of vassalage, he would in our fall have acquired that of confiscation and escheat. And can we think ourselves, then, in terms to capitulate and make our own conditions, and expect God should humour us in all our wild demands?

3. This is indeed to keep up that old rebellion of our progenitor; for that consisted in a discontent with that portion God had assigned him, and coveting what he had restrained him. Nay, indeed, it comes up to the height of the devil's proposal, the attempting "to be as God" (Gen. iii. 5). For it is an endeavour to wrest the management out of his hands, to supersede his authority of dispensing to us, and to carve for ourselves. This is so mad

¹ Rather at verse 28.

CH. II.] OF GOD'S ABSOLUTE SOVEREIGNTY. 17

an insolence, that, were it possible to state a case exactly parallel between man and man, it would raise the indignation of any that but pretended to ingenuity.² Yet this is, without hyperbole, the true meaning of every murmuring, repining thought we entertain.

4. But, as bad as it is, who is there of us that can in this particular say, "We have made our heart clean?" (Prov. xx. 9.) It is true we make some formal acknowledgment sometimes that we receive all from God's gift. Custom teaches us from our infancy, after every meal we eat, to give him thanks (though even that is now thought toc much respect, and begins to be discarded as unfashionable); yet sure he cannot be thought to do that in earnest, that has all the time of his eating been grumbling that his table abounds not with such delicacies as his neighbour's. And yet at this rate, God knows, are most of our thanksgivings. Indeed, we have not so much ordinary civility to God as we have to men. The common proverb teaches us not too curiously to pry into the blemishes of what is given us; but on God's gifts we sit as censors, nicely examine every thing which is any way disagreeable to our fancies, and, as if we dealt with him under the notion of chapmen, disparage it, as Solomon says buyers use to do: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer" (Prov. xx. 14). Nay, we seem yet more absurdly to change

² Ingenuity, --- openness, fairness.

the scene; and, as if God were to make oblations to us, we as critically observe the defects of his benefactions as the Levitical priests were to do those of the sacrifice, and, like angry deities, scornfully reject whatever does not perfectly answer our wanton appetites.

5. And now, should God take us at our words, withdraw all those blessings which we so fastidiously despise, what a condition were we in! It is sure we have nothing to plead in reverse of that judgment. There is nothing in it against justice; for he takes but his own. This he intimates to Israel: "I will return and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax" (Hos. ii. 9). In which he asserts his own propriety, "my corn, my wine," &c., and recalls them to the remembrance that they were but usufructuaries;⁸ and it is as evident that our tenure is but the same. Nay, this proceeding would not be repugnant even to mercy, for even that is not obliged still to prostitute itself to our contempt. I am sure such a tolerance is beyond all the measures of human lenity. Should any of us offer an alms to an indigent wretch, and he, when he sees it is silver, should murmur and exclaim that it is not gold, --- would we not draw back our hand and reserve our charity for a more worthy object? It is true, indeed, God's thoughts are not as our

³ Usufructuary,— one that has the use and temporary profit, not the property, of a thing.

thoughts, nor our narrow bowels equal measures for the Divine compassions; and we experimentally find that his long-suffering infinitely exceeds ours; yet we know he does in the parable of the lord and the servant (Matt. xviii.) declare, that he will proportion his mercy by ours in that instance; and we have no promise that he will not do it in this—nay, we have all reason to expect that he should; for, since his wisdom prompts him to do nothing in vain, and all his bounty to us is designed to make us happy, when he sees that end utterly frustrated by our discontents, to what purpose should he continue that to us which we will be never the better for?

6. Besides, though he be exceedingly patient, yet he is not negligent or insensible; he takes particular notice, not only with what diligence we employ, but with what affections we resent⁴ every of his blessings. And as ingratitude is a vice odious to men, so it is extremely provoking to God; so that in this sense also the words of our Saviour are most true, "from him that hath not," *i.e.* that hath not a grateful sense and value, "shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. xxv. 29). But we may find a threatening of this kind yet more express to Israel, "because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with gladness and with joyfulness of heart for the abundance of all things, therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies, whom the Lord God will send among thee,

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⁴ Resent,—to take well, or ill : now generally used in the latter sense.

in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things" (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48),-a sad and dismal inversion, yet founded wholly in the want of that cheerful recognition which God expected from them. And if Israel, the lot of his own inheritance, that people whom he had singled out from all the nations of the world, could thus forfeit his favour by unthankfulness, sure none of us can suppose we have any surer entail of it. In a word, as God loves a cheerful giver, so he also loves a cheerful receiver -one that complies with his end in bestowing, by taking a just complacence in his gifts. But the querulous and unsatisfied reproach his bounty, accuse him of illiberality and narrowness of mind; so that he seems, even in his honour, engaged to bring them to a righter apprehension of him, and by a deprivation teach them the value of those good things which they could not learn by the enjoyment.

7. If, therefore, ingenuity and gratitude cannot, yet at least let prudence and self-love, engage us against this sin of murmuring, which we see does abundantly justify the character the wise man gives, when he tells us "it is unprofitable" (Wisd. i. 11); he might have said pernicious also, for so it evidently is in its effects. Let us, then, arm ourselves against it, and to that purpose impress deeply upon our minds the present consideration, that God owes us nothing, and that whatever we receive is an alms, and not a tribute. Diogenes being asked what wine drank the most pleasant? answered, that which is

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drunk at another's cost. And this circumstance we can never miss of to recommend our good things to us.-for, be they little or much, they come gratis. When, therefore, in a pettish mood, we find ourselves apt to charge God foolishly, and to think him strait-handed towards us, let us imagine we hear God expostulating with us, as the householder in the parable, "Friend, I do thee no wrong: is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own ?" (Matt. xx. 13, 15.) If God have not the right of disposing, let us find out those that have, and see how much better we shall speed; but if he hath, let us take heed of disputing with him: we that subsist merely by his favour, had need court and cherish it by all the arts of humble observance. Every man is ready to say how ill beggary and pride do agree. The first qualification we cannot put off; O let us not provide it of the other so inconvenient, so odious an adjunct : let us leave off prescribing to God (which no ingenuous man would do to an earthly benefactor); and let us betake ourselves to a more holy and successful policy, the acknowledgment of past mercies, and our own un-This was Jacob's method, "I am not worthiness. worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands;" and with this humble preface he introduces his petition for rescue in his present distress, " Deliver me, I pray thee, from the

hand of my brother," &c. (Gen. xxxii. 10, 11): an excellent pattern of divine rhetoric, which the success demonstrates to have been very prevalent; and we cannot transcribe a better copy to render our desires as successful. Indeed, we are so utterly destitute of all arguments from ourselves, that we can make no reasonable form of address, if we found it not in something of God-and there is nothing even in him adapted to our purpose but his mercy; nor can that be so advantageously urged by any thing as by the former instances it has given of itself; for as God only is fit to be a precedent to himself, so he loves to be so. Thus, we find not only Moses but God often recollecting his miraculous favours towards Israel as an argument to do more: let us therefore accost him in his own way, and, by a frequent and grateful recounting of his former mercies, engage him to future. Nor need we be at a loss for matter of such recollection, if we will but seriously consider what we have already received; which is the subject of the next chapter.





CHAPTER III.

OF GOD'S UNLIMITED BOUNTY.



T is the known character of an unworthy nature to write injuries in marble and benefits in dust; and however some (as Seneca well observes) may acquit themselves of this imputation as to man, yet scarce any do so in relation to God. It is true, indeed, the charge must be a little varied, for God neither will nor can do us injury; yet we receive any thing that is adverse with such a resentment as if it were, and engrave that in our memories with indelible characters, whilst his great and real benefits are either not at all observed, or with so transient an advertence, that the comparison of dust is beyond our pitch, and we may be more properly said to write them in water. Nay, so far are we from keeping records and registers of his favours, that even those standing and fixed ones which sense can prompt us to (without the aid of our memories)

2. Were it not thus, it were impossible for men to be so perpetually in the complaining key, as if

cannot obtain our notice.

their voices were capable of no other sound. One wants this, and another that, and a third something beyond them both, and so on ad infinitum; when all this while every one of them enjoys a multitude of good things without any remark. That very breath wherewith they utter their complaints is a blessing, and a fundamental one too: for if God should withdraw that, they were incapable of whatsoever else they either have or desire. It is true, that some men's impatiences have risen so high as to cast away life, because it was not clothed with all circumstances they wished. Yet these are rare instances, and do only shew such men's depraved judgment of things. A rich jewel is not the less valuable because a madman in his raving fit flings it into the fire; but as to the generality of men, the devil (though a liar) gave a true account of their sense when he said, "Skin for skin; and all that a man hath will he give for his life" (Job ii. 4). And though, perhaps, in an angry fit many men have, with Jonah (chap. iv. 3), "wished to die," yet, ten to one, should death then come, they would be as willing to divert it as was the man in the apologue, who, wearied with his burden of sticks, flung it down and called for death; but when he came, owned no other occasion for him but to be helped up again with his bundle. I dare in this appeal to the experience of those who have seemed very weary of life, whether, when any sudden danger has surprised them, it has not as suddenly altered their mind, and

made them more desire life than before they abhorred it. It is the common saying, as long as there is life, there is hope : there is so, as to secular concerns, for what strange revolutions do we often see in the age of man ! from what despicable beginnings have many arrived to the most splendid conditions !— of which we have divers modern as well as ancient instances : and, indeed, it is admirable to see what time and industry will (with God's blessing) effect : " but there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave" (Eccles. ix. 10); we can improve no more when we are once transplanted thither.

3. But this is yet much more considerable in respect of our spiritual state. Our life is the " day wherein we are to work" (yea, to work out our salvation); but "when the night comes" (when death overtakes), "no man can work" (John ix. 4). Now, alas, when it is considered how much of this day the most of us have loitered away, how many of us have stood idle till the sixth or ninth hour, it will be our concern not to have our day close before the eleventh. Nay, alas, it is yet worse with us : we have not only been idle, but very often ill-busied; so that we have a great part of our time to unravel. and that is not to be done in a moment. For though our works may fitly enough be represented by the prophet's comparison of a "spider's web" (Is. lix. 5), yet they want the best property even of that-they cannot be so soon undone. Vices that are radicated

by time and custom lie too deep to be lightly swept away. It is no easy thing to persuade ourselves to the will of parting with them. Many violences we must offer to ourselves, a long and strict course of mortification must be gone through, ere we can find in our hearts to bid them be gone; and yet when we do so, they are not so tractable as the centurion's servants: they will indeed come whenever we bid them, but they will scarce go so; they must be expelled by force and slow degrees; we must fight for every inch of ground we gain from them: and as God would not assist the Israelites to subdue the Canaanites at once (Deut. vii. 22), so neither ordinarily does he us to master perfectly our corrup-Now, a process of this difficulty is not to be tions. despatched on a sudden. And yet this is not all our task; for we have not only ill habits to extirpate, but we have also good ones to acquire : it is not a mere negative virtue will serve our turns, nor will empty lamps enter us into the marriage-chamber (Matt. xxv. 10). "We must add to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance," &c. (2 Pet. i. 5.) No link must be wanting of that sacred chain; but we must, as the same apostle advises, " be holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet. i. 15).

4. And now I would desire the reader seriously to consider, whether he can upon good grounds tell himself that this so difficult (and yet so necessary) a work is effectually wrought in him. If it be, he is a

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happy man, and can with no pretence complain of any external want: he that is fed with manna must be strangely perverse if he murmur for a bellyful of " leeks and onions" (Num. xi. 5.); but, on the contrary, he owes infinite thanks to God, that has spared him time for this important business, and did not put a period to his natural life before he had begun a spiritual; for I fear there are among the best of us few of so entire an innocence but they may remember some either habits or acts of sin, in which it would have been dreadful for them to have been snatched away. And then, how comprehensive, how prolific a mercy has life been to them, when it has carried eternity in its womb, and their continuance on earth has qualified them for heaven! Neither are such persons only to look on it as a blessing in the retrospect, as it relates to the past, but also in the present and future,-which, if they continue to employ well, does not only confirm but advance their reward. Besides, God may please by them to glorify himself, make them instrumental to his service, which as it is the greatest honour, so it is also the greatest satisfaction to a good heart. He shews himself too mercenary that so longs for his reward as to grow impatient of his attendances: he that loves God thinks himself blessed in the opportunity of doing work, as well as in receiving wages. Thus we see how life is, under all these aspects, a mercy to a pious man, and such as not only obliges him to contentment, but gratitude.

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THE ART OF CONTENTMENT.

5. But supposing a man cannot give this comfortable account of his life, but is conscious that he has spent it to a very different purpose, yet does not that at all lessen his obligations to God, who meant he should have employed it better; and that he has not done so is merely his own fault. Nav. indeed, the worse his state is, the greater mercy it is that God has not made it irreversible, that he has not cut him off at once from the earth and the possibility of heaven too, but affords him yet a longer " day, if yet he will hear his voice" (Ps. xcv. 7). This long-suffering is one of the most transcendent acts of Divine goodness, and therefore the apostle rightly styles it "the riches of his goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance" (Rom. ii. 4); and so at last we commonly acknowledge it, when we have worn it out, and can no longer receive advantage by it. What a value does a gasping, despairing soul put upon a small parcel of that time which before he knew not how fast enough to squander! O that men would set the same estimate on it before ! and then certainly, as it would make them better husbands of it, so it would also render them more thankful for it, " accounting that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. iii. 15).

6. Indeed, did men but rightly compute the benefit of life upon this score, all secular incumbrances and uneasinesses of it would be overwhelmed, and stand only as ciphers in the account. What a shame is it, then, that we should spend our

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breath in sighs and outcries, which, if we would employ to those nobler ends for which it was given, would supersede our complaints, and make us confess we were well dealt with; that "our life" (though bare and stripped of all outward accessaries) " is given us for a prey" (Jer. xlv. 5). And, indeed, he that has yet the great work of life to do, can very ill spare time or sorrow to bestow upon the regretting any temporal distress, since his whole stock is little enough to bewail and repair his neglects of his eternal concerns. Were all our lives, therefore, destitute of all outward comfort, nay, were they nothing but a scene of perpetual disasters, yet this one advantage of life would infinitely outweigh them all, and render our murmurings very inexcusable.

7. But God has not put this to the utmost trial, has never placed any man in such a state of unmixed calamity, but that he still affords many and great allays. He finds it fit sometimes to defalk¹ some of our outward comforts, and perhaps embitter others; but he never takes all away. This must be acknowledged, if we do but consider how many things there are in which the whole race of mankind do in common partake. The four elements, fire and water, air and earth, do not more make up every man's composition than they supply his needs: the whole host of heaven, the sun, moon, and stars, Moses will tell us, are by "God divided to all nations under the whole heaven" (Deut. iv.

¹ To defaik,---to cut off, to lop away.

19). Those resplendent bodies equally afford their light and influence to all. The sun shines as bright on the poor cottage as on the most magnificent palace; and the stars have their benign aspects as well for him that "is behind the mill as for him that sitteth on the throne" (Ex. xi. 5). Propriety² (that great incendiary below) breeds no confusion in those celestial orbs; but they are every man's treasure, yet no man's peculiar; as if they meant to teach us, that our love of appropriation " descends not from above" (Jam. iii. 15), is no heavenly quality.

8. And as they make no distinction of the ranks and degrees of men, so neither do they of their virtues. Our Saviour tells us, God causes "his sun to rise on the good and on the evil, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. v. 45). If now we descend lower, to the sublunary creatures, they equally pay their homage to man, do not disdain the dominion of the poor and submit to that of the rich, but shew us that their instinct extends to the whole nature. A horse draws the poor man's plough as tamely as the prince's chariot; and the beggar's hungry cur follows him with as much obsequiousness and affection as the pampered lap-dogs of the nicest ladies. The sheep obey a poor mercenary shepherd as well as they did the daughters of the wealthy Laban (Gen. xxix. 9), or of Jethro, a prince (Exod. ii. 16); and as willingly ² Propriety,---exclusive right.

yield their fleeces to clothe Lazarus as to make purple for Dives. And as animals, so vegetables are as communicative of their qualities to one man as another. The corn nourishes, the fruits refresh, the flowers delight, the simples cure the poor man as well as the rich.

9. But I foresee it will be objected that these natural privileges are insignificant, because they are evacuated by those positive laws which bound propriety, and that therefore, though one man could use the creatures as well as another, yet every man has them not to use. I answer, that for some of the things I have mentioned they are still in their native latitude, cannot be enclosed or monopolised. The most ravenous oppressor could never yet lock up the sun in his chest: "he that lays house to house, or land to land, till there be no place" (Is. v. 8), cannot enclose the common air. And the like may be said of divers of the rest; so that there are some (and those no mean) blessings, which continue still the indefeasible right of mankind in general.

10. As for those other things which are liable to the restrictive terms of *mine* and *thine*, it is not to be denied but there is vast difference in the dispensing them; as great as Nathan's parable describes, when he speaks of the numerous flocks of the rich man, and the "single ewe-lamb of the poor" (2 Sam. xii. 23): yet there is scarce any so deplorably indigent but that by one means or other he has, or may have, the necessary supports of life.

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Perhaps they fall not into his lap by birthright and inheritance, yet they are acquirable by labour and industry, which is perhaps the better tenure. They cannot, it may be, arrive to "Sodom's fulness of bread," yet if they have not her "abundance of idleness" (Ez. xvi. 49), they commonly need not want that which was the height of Agur's wish, " food convenient" (Prov. xxx. 8). It is true, indeed, if they will fold their hands in their bosom, if, with Solomon's "sluggard, they will not plough by reason of the cold," they must take his fate in the summer, as they have his ease in the winter, " they may beg in harvest, and have nothing" (Prov. xx. 4). But then it is visible they are the authors of their own necessities. And, indeed, to men of such lazy, careless natures, it is hard to say what degree of God's bounty can keep them from want, since we often see the fairest fortunes dissipated as well by the supine negligence as the riotous prodigality of the owners; and therefore, if men will be idle, they are not to accuse God, but themselves, if they be indigent.

11. But, then, there is one case wherein men seem more inevitably exposed, and that is when by age, sickness, or decrepitude, they are disabled from work, or when their family is too numerous for their work to maintain. And this, indeed, seems the most forlorn state of poverty; yet God has provided for them also, by assigning such persons to the care of the rich: nay, he has put an extra-

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ordinary mark of favour on them, given them the honour of being his proxies and representatives, made them letters of attorney, as it were, to demand relief in his name, and upon his account. And though it is too true, that even that authority will not prevail with many of the rich to open their purses, yet, even in this age of frozen charity, there are still some who remember upon what terms they received their wealth, and employ it accordingly. And though the number of them is not so great as were to be wished, yet there are in all parts some scattered here and there, like " cities of refuge" in the land (Deut. xix. 23), to which these poor distressed creatures may flee for succour. And I think I may say, that between the legal provisions that are made in this case and voluntary contributions, there are not very many that want the things that are of absolute necessity; and we know St. Paul comprises those in a small compass, " food and raiment," and proposes them as sufficient materials of content (1 Tim. vi. 8). I say not this to contract any man's bowels, or lessen his compassions to such poor wretches. For how much soever they lend, I wish, as Joab did in another case to David, the Lord "increase it a hundredfold" (2 Sam. xxiv. 3). I only urge it as an evidence of the assertion I am to prove, that no man is so pretermitted³ by God, or his disposal of temporals, but that even he that seems the most abandoned has a share in his pro-

vidence, and consequently cannot justly murmur, since even this state, which is the highest instance of human indigence, is not without its receipts from God.

12. But the number in this form are but few compared to those in a higher; for between this and the highest affluence, how many intermedial degrees are there, in which men partake not only of the necessaries but comforts of life-that have not only food and raiment, but their distinction of holyday and working-day fare and apparel! He that is but one step advanced from beggary has so much, he that has got to a second has more than is necessary; and so every degree rises in plenty till it comes to vanity and excess. And even there too there are gradual risings; some having so much fuel for luxury, that they are at as great a loss for invention as others can be for materials, and complain that there are no farther riots left for them to essay. How many are there who have so cloved and glutted their senses, that they want some other inlets for pleasure; and, with the rich man in the gospel, are in distress where to bestow their abundance !

13. And sure such as these cannot deny that they have received good things, yet generally there are none less contented; which is a clear demonstration that our repinings proceed not from any defect of bounty in God, but from the malignant temper of our own hearts. And as it is an easier

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thing to satisfy the cravings of an hungry than to cure the nauseous recoilings of a surfeited stomach, so certainly the discontents of the poor are much easier allayed than those of the rich. The indigence of the one has contracted his desires, and has taught him not to look farther than a little beyond bare necessaries; so that a moderate alms satisfies, and a liberal transports him : but he who by a perpetual repletion has his desires stretched and extended, is capable of no such satisfaction. When his enjoyments forestall all particular pursuits, and he knows not upon what to fasten his next wish, yet even then he has some confused unformed appetites, and thinks himself miserable because he cannot tell what would make him more happy. And yet this is that envied state which men with so much greediness aspire to. Every man looks on it as the top of felicity, to have nothing more to wish in the world. And yet, alas, even that, when attained, would be their torment. Let men never think, then, that contentment is to be caught by long and foreign chases; he is likeliest to find it who sits at home, and duly contemplates those blessings which God has brought within his reach, of which every man has a fair proportion, if he will advert to it.

14. For besides these external accessions (of which the meanest have some, the middle sort a great deal, and the uppermost rather too much), man is a principality within himself, and has in

his composition so many excellent impresses of his Maker's power and goodness, that he need not ask leave of any exterior thing to be happy, if he know but aright how to value himself: the very meanest part of him, his body, is a piece of admirable workmanship, of a most incomprehensible contrivance; as the Psalmist says, "he is fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. cxxxix, 13); and it is astonishing to think of what a symmetry of parts this beautiful fabric is made up. Nor are they only for show, but use: every member, every limb, is endowed with a particular faculty to make it serviceable to the whole; and so admirable is the contexture of veins and arteries, sinews and muscles, nerves and tendons, that none are superfluous, but some way or other contribute to vegetation, sense, or motion. Nay, the most noble and most useful parts are all of them double; not only as a reserve in case of misadventure of one part, but also as an instance of the bounty of the donor. And, indeed, it is observable of Galen in his writings, that after he had taken great care to exempt himself and all of his profession from taking notice of the Deity, by saving, that to discourse concerning the gods was the task of speculative philosophers; yet coming to write of the use of the parts of the body, de usu partium, and considering the frame of human bodies, and therein discovering the wonderful contrivance of every part in reference to itself, and also to the whole - their strength, agility, and

various movement, infinitely surpassing the powers of all mechanic engines,-he seems to have had the fate we read of Saul in holy Scripture, and against his genius and purpose to become a prophet, breaking frequently out into hymns and sacred raptures; saving, these mysteries are more divine than the Samothracian or Eleusinian, and confessing they both strictly require, and infinitely excel, the low returns of human praise. But beyond the fabric of parts as organic, what an extract of won-Lord," as the son of Sirach rightly, and by way of eminence, styles them (Ecclus. xvii. 5). By these we draw all outward objects to ourselves. What were the beauties of the universe to us, if we had not sight to behold them; or the most melodious sounds, if we had not hearing? and so of the rest. And yet these are not only generally given, but also preserved to the greater part of men; and perhaps would be to more, did not our base undervaluing of common mercies force God sometimes to instruct us in their worth, by making us feel what it is to want them.

15. Multitudes of refreshments also God has provided for our bodies; particularly that of sleep, of which he has been so considerate, as in his distributions of time to make a solemn allotment for it; yet who, almost, when he lies down considers the mercy, or when he rises refreshed rises thankful also? But if our rest at any time be interrupted by the cares

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of our mind, or pains of our bodies, then, and not till then, we consider that it is "God who gives his beloved sleep" (Ps. cxxvii. 2), and think it a blessing worth our esteem. Thus it is with health, strength, and every thing else; we despise it whilst we have it, and impatiently desire it whilst we have it not; but in the interim, sure we cannot complain that God's hand is shortened towards us. when in the ordinary course of his Providence we commonly enjoy these mercies many years, which we find so much miss of, if they be withdrawn but for a few hours. And, indeed, there is not a greater instance of human pravity than our senseless contempt of blessings, merely because they are customary; which in true reason is an argument why we should prize them the more. When we deal with men, we discern it well enough : he that gives me once a hundred pounds, I account not so much my benefactor, as if he made it my annual revenue; yet God must lose his thanks by multiplying his favours, and his benefits grow more invisible by their being always before us.

16. But the body, with its enjoyments, is but the lowest instance of God's bounty; it is but a decent case for that inestimable jewel he has put in it: the soul, like the ark,⁴ is the thing for which this whole tabernacle was framed; and that is a spark of divinity, in which alone it is that God accomplished his design of "making man in his own ⁴ See Heb. ix. 3. 4.

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image" (Gen. i. 26). It would be too long to attempt an exact survey of its particular excellencies. The mere intellectual powers, wherewith it is endued, have exercised the curiosity and raised the admiration of the great contemplators of nature in all ages; yet, after all, of so subtle composure is the soul, that it is inscrutable even to itself: and though the simplest man knows he has the faculties of imagination, apprehension, memory, reflection, yet the most learned cannot assign where they are seated, or by what means they operate. It is enough to us that we have them, and many excellent uses for them; one whereof (and a most necessary one) is a thankful reflection on the goodness of God who gave them. He might have made us in the very lowest form of creatures, insensible stocks or stones; or, if he had advanced us a step higher, he might have fixed us among mere animals, made us perhaps of the noxious, at best of the tamer, sort of beasts: but he has placed us in the highest rank of visible creatures, and not only given " dominion over the works of his hands" (Ps. viii. 6), but has given us the use of reason, wherewith to manage that sovereignty, without which we had only been the more masterful sort of brutes.

17. Yet still the soul is to be considered in a higher notion, that of its immortality and capacity of endless bliss; and here, indeed, it owns its extraction, and is an image of the first Being, whose felicity is coexistent with himself \cdot this, as it is the

most transcendent accomplishment of our nature. so it is most universal. Whatever disparity there may be between man and man in other respects. vet in this all are equal. The poor beggar at the gate has a soul as capacious of eternal happiness, as he whose crumbs he begs for, nay, sometimes better prepared for it, as that parable shews, Luke xvi. 21. And though the dignities of earth are the prize of the rich and noble, the subtle and designing, yet heaven is as easily mounted from the dunghill as the throne; and an honest simplicity will sooner bring us thither than all the Machiavellian policy. Nay, God has not only designed us to so glorious an end, but has done all on his part to secure us of it-sent his Son to lead us the way, his Spirit to quicken us in it. We need not dispute how universal this is; it is sure it concerns all to whom I am now speaking,---those that are within the pale of the Church: and if it should prove confined to them, the more peculiar is their obligation, that are thus singled out from the rest of the world, and the greater ought to be their thankfulness. The heathen philosopher made it matter of his solemn acknowledgment to Fortune, that he was born a Grecian, and not a barbarian; and sure the advantages of our Christianity are of a much higher strain, and ought to be infinitely more celebrated. The apostle we find often applauding this glorious privilege, as that which makes us "fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God" (Eph.

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ii. 19); nay, which elevates us to a higher state, "the adoption of sons" (Gal. iv. 5); nor only sons, but "heirs also of God, and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. viii. 17). And what ambition is there so greedy which this will not satisfy? Yet this is our common state, the birthright of our regeneration, if we do not degrade ourselves, and, with Esau, basely sell our title.

18. And now methinks every man may interrogate himself in the same form wherein Jonadab did Amnon: "Why art thou, being the king's son, thus lean from day to day?" (2 Sam. xiii. 4.) Why should a person who is adopted by the King of kings thus languish and pine? What is there below the sun worthy his notice, much less his desires, that hath a kingdom above it? Certainly did we but know how to estimate ourselves upon this account, it were impossible for us with such sordid condescensions to court every petty worldly interest, and so impatiently vex ourselves when we Alas! how unworthily do we cannot attain it. bear the name of Christians, when that which carried the forefathers of our faith through the most fiery trials cannot support us under the disappointment of any extravagant desire ! They had such " respect to the recompense of the reward" (Heb. xi. 26), as made them cheerfully expose their fame to ignominy, their goods to rapine, their bodies to the most exquisite tortures, and their lives to death. Yet the same hopes cannot work us to any tolerable

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degree of patience, when we suffer but the smallest diminution in any of these. What shall we say? Is heaven grown less valuable, or earth more, than it was then? No, surely, but we are more infatuated in our estimates; we have so long abetted the rivalry of the handmaid, that the mistress, like Sarah, appears despicable. Like Jonah, we sit down sullen upon the withering of a gourd, never considering that God has provided us a better shelter, "a building of God, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. v. 1). Indeed, there can be no temporal destitution so great which such an expectation cannot make supportable. Were we in Job's condition. sitting upon a dunghill, and scraping ourselves with a potsherd, yet as long as we can say with him " our Redeemer liveth" (Job xix. 25), we have all reason to say with him also, " blessed be the name of the Lord" (ch. i. 21). What a madness is it then for us to expose ourselves to be pierced and wounded by every temporal adversity, who have so impenetrable an armour ! nay, what an ungrateful contumely is it to that goodness of God, to shew that we cannot make him a counterpoise to the most trivial secular satisfaction ! on which account sure he may again take up that exprobrating⁵ complaint we find in the prophet, " A goodly price that I was valued at by them" (Zech. xi. 13).

19. But how mean soever he is in our eyes,

⁵ To exprobrate,---to charge upon with reproach.

though Christ seem the same to us in his glory which he did in his abjection, to have no beauty that we should desire him ; vet he puts another rate upon himself, and tells us that he " that loves father of mother, son or daughter, more than me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. x. 37). Now our love and our joy are passions coincident; and therefore whatever we joy more in than we do in him, we may be presumed to love better; and if he cannot endure the competition of those more ingenuous objects of our love he here mentions, how will he suffer that of our vanities, our childish, wanton appetites? And yet those are the things after which we so impatiently rave. For I believe I may truly affirm, that if there were a scrutiny made into all the discontents of mankind, for one that were fastened upon any great considerable calamity, there are many that are founded only in the irregularity of our own desires.

20. By what has been said, we may justly conclude in the prophet's phrase, "God hath not been to us a wilderness, a land of darkness" (Jer. ii. 31), but has graciously dispensed to us in all our interests. Yet the instances here given are only common, such as relate to all, or at least the far greater part of mankind; but what volumes might be made, should every man set down his own particular experiences of mercy! In that case it would be no extravagant hyperbole we find John xxii. 25, " that even the world itself could not contain

the books which should be written." God knows our memories are very frail, and our observations slight in this point; yet abstracting from all the forgotten or neglected favours, what vast catalogues may every man make to himself, if he would but yet recollect what effects he has had of God's bounty in giving, of his providence in protecting, of his grace in restraining and exciting, of his patience in forbearing! And certainly all these productions of the Divine goodness were never designed to die in the birth. The Psalmist will tell us. " The Lord hath so done his marvellous works that they ought to be had in remembrance" (Ps. cxi. 3). Let every man then make it his daily care to recount to himself the wonders God hath done. as for the children of men in general, so for himself in particular. When the Israelites murmured under their bondage, Pharaoh imputes it to their idleness, and prescribes them more work as the readiest cure : a piece, indeed, of inhuman tyranny in him, but may with equity and success be practised by us upon ourselves. When we find our appetites mutinous, complaining of our present condition, let us set ourselves to work-impose it as a task upon ourselves to recollect the many instances of God's mercies. And surely, if we do it sincerely and with intention,⁶ we cannot have passed through half our stages before our sullen murmurs will be beat out

⁶ Intention,—eagerness of desire, closeness of attention, deep thought.

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CH. III.] OF GOD'S UNLIMITED BOUNTY.

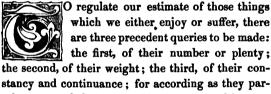
of countenance, and retire with shame when they are confronted with such a cloud of witnesses, such signal testimonies of God's goodness to us: for when we have mustered up all our little grievances, most critically examined all our wants, we shall find them very unproportionable to our comforts and to our receipts; in which comparative notion the next chapter is to consider them.





CHAPTER IV.

OF THE SURPLUSAGE OF OUR ENJOYMENTS ABOVE OUR SUFFERINGS.



take more of these properties, every good is more good, and every evil is more evil. It will therefore be our best method of trial, in the present case, to compare our blessings and our calamities in these three respects.

2. And first in that of plenty: the mercies of God are the source of all our good, are set out to us in holy Scripture in the most superlative strain. They are "multitude" (Ps. cvi. 7); "plenteous redemption" (Ps. cxxx. 7); "as high as the heaven" (Ps. ciii. 11). He "fills all things living with plenteousness" (Ps. cxlv. 16). His mercies, indeed, are such as come not within the compass of number. but stretch themselves to infinity, and are best represented by such a calculation as God made to Abraham, when he shewed the numerousness of his posterity by the innumerableness of the stars (Gen. xv. 5). Were there but a single mercy apportioned to each minute of our lives, the sum would arise very high; but how is our arithmetic confounded when every minute has more than we can distinctly number! For, besides the original stock mentioned in the last chapter, and the accession of new bounty, the giving us somewhat which we had not before, what an accumulative mercy is it, the preserving what we have! We are made up of so many pieces, have such varieties of interests, spiritual, temporal, public and private, for ourselves, for our friends and dependents, that it is not a confused general regard that will keep all in security one moment. We are like a vast building, which costs as much to maintain as to erect : and indeed. considering the corruptibleness of our materials, our preservation is no less a work of Omnipotence than our first forming; nay, perhaps it is rather a greater. Our original clay, though it had no aptness, yet it had no aversions to the receiving a human form, but was in the hand of the potter to make it what he pleased; but we now have principles of decay within us, which vehemently tend to dissolution: we want the supplies of several things without us, the failing whereof returns us again to our dust. Nay, we do not only need the aid, but we fear the hostility of outward things: that very air which sometimes refreshes us may at another starve and freeze us: that which warms and comforts us has also a power of consuming us; yea, that very meat which nourishes may choke and stifle us. In a word, there is no creature so despicable, so inconsiderable, which may not sometimes serve us, and which may not at any time (if God permit) ruin us. Now, whence is it that we so constantly, so frequently find the good, the benign efficacy of these things, and so seldom, so rarely the evil? Whence, I say, is it, but from the active unwearied Providence, which draws forth the better properties of the creatures for our use, and restrains the worse for our security; which, with a particular advertence, watches not only over every person, but over every several concern of that person? And how astonishing a contemplation is this! If the mere ebbing and flowing of the sea put the philosopher¹ into such an ecstasy, that he flung himself into it, because he could not comprehend the inscrutable cause of it; in what perpetual raptures of admiration may we be, who have every minute within us and about us more and greater wonders, and those too in our favour, when we deserve rather the Divine Power should exert itself in our destruction !

3. But, alas, our danger from the visible crea-

¹ The story is related of Aristotle ; but it is not worthy of credit.—ED.

CH. IV.) ENJOYMENTS ABOVE SUFFEBINGS.

tures is little compared with that from the spirits of darkness: "We wrestle not only with flesh and blood, but with principalities and powers, with spiritual wickedness," &c. (Eph. vi. 12.) So inveterate is the enmity between the serpent and the seed of the woman in general, that he watches all advantages against us, not only in our souls, but even our bodies, our goods, and in every part of our concerns. Thus we see he not only assaulted Job's soul by the wicked insinuations of his wife, but (with more effect) his body with boils and sores, his possessions by the Chaldeans and Sabeans, and the images of himself, his dearest children, by a wind from the wilderness (Job i.). And can we think his malice is now worn out? No, surely he still wishes as ill to mankind as ever; and we should soon see the woful effects of it, did not the same Power which let him loose for Job's trial restrain him for our safety: nay, had he but power to affright, though not to hurt us, even that would make our life very uncomfortable. We cannot hear the relation of spirits or apparitions but our blood chills upon it, and a horror runs through our veins; what should we then do, if he should make his night-walks through our chambers, and with his illusory terrors disturb our rest! Yet all this, and much more, he would do, if God did not chain up this "old dragon" (Rev. xx.); nay, if he were not at the expense of a guard about us, and those no less than angels. I shall not dispute whether every person hath not

his peculiar guardian; for, though many have not improbably asserted it, we have ground enough of acquiescence in the general affirmation of the apostle, " that they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation" (Heb. i. 14). And now, if the reader please to sum up how many are his concerns, and how many are the dangers which await him in them all, he cannot sure render the account of those mercies which preserve the one and divert the other in any other phrase than that of the Psalmist, " They are more than I am able to express" (Ps. xl. 7).

4. We may now challenge the most miserable or the most querulous man living to produce causes of complaint proportionable to those of thanksgiving. He that has the greatest stock of calamities can never vie with the heaps of benefits; the disproportion is greater than that of the armies of Ahab and Benhadad, whereof the one was like "two little flocks of kids, the other filled the country" (1 Kings God has told us that he "afflicts not xx. 27). willingly, nor grieves the children of men" (Lam. iii. 33); whereas, on the contrary, he "delighteth in mercy" (Mic. vii. 18). We may judge by ourselves which he is likeliest often to repeat, those acts which he doth with regret and reluctancy, or those which he does with pleasure and delight. But we need no inferences where we have the attestation of experience. Let every man, therefore, make this his judge in the case; let him every night recollect how many

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things within and about him he is concerned in; and consider how many of those have been preserved entire to him, still accounting every thing so continued as a new donation. If he begin with his spiritual state, it is too possible he may sometimes find he has lost his innocence, committed some, perhaps many, sins ; but even in these he will find cause to justify God, if he do but recollect with what inward checks and admonitions, and outward restraints. God has endeavoured to bridle him. If he will break through those fences, that does not at all derogate from the mercy of God, which so guarded him; but it rather illustrates his goodness, that, after so many quenchings of his Spirit, does vet continue its influence. So that even he that has the most deplorably violated his integrity, is yet to confess that God's purpose was to have preserved it entire; and he might really so have kept it, had he complied with those aids which were afforded him. But in temporal concerns we are not so apt to undermine ourselves, and therefore shall more rarely find we have suffered detriment in them than in our spiritual; but are there ordinarily like to meet with a better account. Let a man, therefore, consider what is lacking to him of all the secular good things he had in the morning, and tell me whether, for the most part, he may not give such an account as the Israelitish officers did of their men after the slaughter of the Midianites, " that he hath not lost one" (Num. xxxi. 49); or if sometimes

he do suffer a diminution, yet at the worst he will find that many more good things have been preserved to him than have been taken from him. Α man may perhaps meet with some damage in his estate, yet it is manifold odds that that damage is but partial, and that he has still more left than is lost: or if it be more entire, yet if he have his health, his limbs, his senses, his friends, and all things beside his estate left him, so that for one thing he has lost he still retains a multitude, he may say of it as the disciples of the few loaves, "What is this among so many?" (John vi. 9.) Aristippus being bemoaned for the loss of a farm, replied, with some sharpness, upon his condoler, "You have but one field, and I have yet three left; why should I not rather grieve for you?" intimating that a man is not so much to estimate what he has lost as what he has left. A piece of wisdom, which if we would transcribe, we might quickly convince ourselves that even in our most adverse estate there are, as Elisha speaks, "more with us than against us" (2 Kings vi. 16); that our enjoyments are more than our sufferings; and God's acts of grace do far outnumber those of his severity.

5. And as they do outnumber, so also do they outweigh them. The mercies we receive from God are (as the last chapter has shewn) of the greatest importance, the most substantial solid goods; and the greatest of all — I mean those which concern our eternal state — are so firmly fixed on us, that

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unless we will voluntarily quit our claim, it is not in the power of men or devils to defeat us. Light bodies are easily blown away by every gust of wind; but this "weight of glory," as the apostle calls it (2 Cor. iv. 17), continues firm and stable, is proof against all storms, like the "shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Is. xxxii. 2). Those dark adumbrations we have of it might have served to refresh and deceive the tediousness of our pilgrimage; and therefore the most formidable calamities of this life are below all measures of comparison with this hope of our calling, this " riches of the glory of our inheritance" (Eph. iii. 16). The heaviest and most pressing of our afflictions are to that " but like the small dust of the balance" (Is. xl. 15); so that if we should here stop our inquisition, we have a sufficient resolution of the present question, and must conclude, that God has given us an abundant counterpoise of all we either do or can suffer here.

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6. If, therefore, there be any so forlorn as to temporals, that he can fetch thence no evidence of God's fatherly care of him, yet this one consideration may solve his doubts, and convince him that he is not abdicated by him. We read of no "gifts" Abraham gave Isaac, yet to the sons of the concubines it is said he did (Gen. xxv. 6). It had been a very fallacious inference if Isaac should have concluded himself neglected, because his far greater portion was but in reversion. And it will be the same in any of us, if we argue an unkindness from

any temporal wants, who have the entail of an eternal inheritance. But surely "God does not leave himself without witness" (Acts xiv. 17) even in secular things: there is no man breathing but has some blessings of his left hand as well as his right, as I have already mentioned; and unless it be some few prodigies of calamity, in whose punishment or patience God designs signally to glorify himself. there are none who enjoy not greater comforts of life than those they want-I mean such as are really greater, though perhaps to their prejudiced fancies they do not appear so. Thus in point of health, if a man be disaffected in one part, yet all the rest of his body may be, and often is, well; or if he have a complication, and have more than one disease. yet there is no man that has all, or half so many as are incident to human bodies; so that he is comparatively more healthy than sick. So, again, it is not very common for a man to lose a limb or sense; the generality of men keep them to their last; and they who do, have in that an overbalance to most outward adversities; and even they who are so unhappy to lose one, yet commonly keep the rest, at least the major part; or if at any time any man is left a mere breathing trunk, yet it is by such stupifying diseases as deaden the senses, or such mortal ones as soon take them away, and so the remedy overtakes the malady. Besides, it pleases God very often to make compensation for the wantof one member or faculty by improving the use of

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another. We have seen feet supply all the necessary uses of hands to those who have had none; and it is a thing of daily observation, that men that are blind have the greater internal light, have their intellects more vigorous and active by their abstractions from visible objects.

7. Thus also it is in the matter of wealth : he that is forced to get his bread by the sweat of his brow, it is true he cannot have those delicacies wherewith rich men abound; yet his labour helps him to a more poignant, a more savoury sauce than a whole college of epicures can compound. His hunger gives a higher gust to his dry crust than the surfeited stomach can find in the most costly, most elaborate mixtures: so verifying the observation of Solomon, " The full soul loatheth the honeycomb, but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet" (Prov. xxvii. 7). He cannot indeed "stretch himself upon his bed of ivory" (Amos vi. 4); yet his sleeps are sounder than those that can. The wise man tells us, and experience does so too, that "the sleep of a labouring man is sweet" (Eccles. v. 12). He is not clothed gorgeously, has not the splendour of glittering apparel; so neither has he the care of contriving it, the fears of being forestalled in a new invention, or any of those unmanly solicitudes which attend that vanity. He has the proper genuine use of clothing, the preventing shame and cold, and is happily determined to that which the wiser men of the world have voluntarily

chosen. To conclude, he has one advantage beyond all these: his necessities rescue him from idleness, and all its consequent temptations; which is so great a benefit, that if rich men be not their own taskmasters, as his wants are his,—if they do not provide themselves of business,—that one want of theirs is infinitely more deplorable than all his; and he is not only happy, comparatively, with himself, in having better things than he wants, but with them also.

8. If we come now to reputation and fame, the account will be much the same. He that is eminent in the world for some great achievement, is set up as an object of every man's remark; when, as his excellencies on the one hand are visible, so his faults and blemishes are on the other; and as human frailty makes it too probable these latter will be really more, so human envy makes it sure that they shall be more precisely, more curiously observed, and more loudly blazoned. So that, upon the whole, a good quiet security, though it be not the road to glory, yet it is the likeliest fence against infamy. And, indeed, he that can keep up the repute of a sober integrity within his own private sphere, need not envy the triumphant sallies of others, which often meet with a fatal turn at the latter end of the day. But it will be said, that even that more moderate sort of reputation is not every man's portion; but that many lie under great ignominy and scandals. I shall here ask, whether those

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be just or unjust. If they be just, they belong not to our present subject, which relates only to those inflictions which are the effects of God's immediate providence, not of our own crimes; for I never doubted but that by those we may divest ourselves of any, nay, of all the good things God has designed But if the obloquy be unjust, it is probable us. that it is taken up only by ill men, and that the good pass a more equitable sentence; and then surely the attestation of a few such is able to outweigh a multitude of the others. And in this case, a man may not only find patience, but pleasure in reproaches. Socrates looked with trouble and jealousy on himself when ill men commended him, saying, "What ill have I done?" And sure a Christian has a farther reason to be pleased with their revilings, they being his security against the "woe" pronounced to those "whom all men speak well of" (Luke vi. 26). But sometimes it happens that even good men are seduced; and either by the artifices of the wicked, or their own too hasty credulity, give credit to unjust reports. And this, I confess, is a sharp trial to the injured person; yet even this cannot often be universal. There can scarce be any innocence so forlorn but that there may be opportunities of clearing it to some or other, and by them propagating it to more. And if the cloud ever come to be dispersed, their fame will appear with the brighter lustre. But if none of this happen, they have yet a certain and more

THE ART OF CONTENTMENT.

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blessed retreat,-even an appeal to the unerring Judge, who never beholds us with more approbation than when we are under the unjust condemnation of men. Indeed, we have then a double tie upon him; not only his justice, but his pity is concerned in our cause. God particularly owns himself as the refuge of the oppressed, and there is scarce a sharper and more sensible oppression than this of calumny; yet even this proves advantage, whilst it procures God's immediate patronage, makes us the objects of his more peculiar care and compassion, who can "make our righteousness as clear as the light" (Ps. xxxvii. 6), if he see it fit: but if in his wisdom he choose not that for us, it is comfort enough for us that we have approved it to him. It was Elkanah's question to Hannah in her disconsolation, "Am not I better to thee than ten sons?" (1 Sam. i. 8.) And sure we may say the like of God's approbation, that it is better to us, I say not than ten, but ten thousand eulogies of men. The very echo of it in the testimony of a good conscience is an unspeakable comfort; and this voice sounds more audibly, more sweetly, among the loudest, the harshest accusations of men. So that we see even this assault too is not without its guard; and these " waters of Marah" (Ex. xv. 23) may be rendered not only wholesome, but pleasant.

9. I have now instanced, in the three most general concerns of human life, the body, goods, and

сн. 17.] ENJOYMENTS ABOVE SUFFERINGS.

fame; to which heads may be reduced most of the afflictions incident to our outward state, as far as immediately concerns ourselves. But there is no man stands so single in the world, but he has some relations or friends in which he thinks himself interested. And many times those oblique strokes which wound us through them are as painful as the most direct. Yet here also God is ordinarily pleased to provide some allays, if we would but take notice of them. He who has had one friend die. has ordinarily divers others surviving; or if he have not that, usually God raises him up others. It is true we cannot have a succession of fathers and mothers, yet we often have of other friends that are no less helpful to us; and indeed there are scarce in any thing more remarkable evidences of Providence than in this particular. "He that is able out of stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt. iii. 9), does many times, by as unexpected a production, supply friends to the desolate. But we do sometimes lose our friends while they are livingthey withdraw their kindness, which is the soul of friendship; and if this happen by our own demerit, we can accuse neither God nor them for it: nor can we rationally expect that God should provide supplies, when we wilfully despoil ourselves. But when they are unkind without provocation, then is the season for His interposition, who uses to take up those whom "father and mother forsake" (Ps. xxvii. 10). And we frequently see signal proofs

of his care, in exciting the compassions of other friends and relatives, or, perhaps, of mere strangers; nay, sometimes God makes the inhumanity of a man's relations the occasion of his advantage. Thus the barbarous malice of Joseph's brethren was the first step to his dominion over Egypt. And it is a common observation in families, that the most discountenanced child oft makes better proof than the darling.

10. We are yet liable to a third affliction, by the calamity of our friends, which, by the sympathy of kindness, presses us no less (perhaps more) sensibly than our own; but, then, it is to be considered that theirs are capable of the same allaying circumstances that ours are, and God has the same arts of alleviating their burdens: so that we have the same arguments for acquiescence in their sufferings that we have in our own, and shall do a more friendly office in impressing those upon them than in the most passionate adopting their sorrows.

11. The last and greatest discomfort from friends is that of their sin; and if ever we may be allowed that disconsolate strain of the prophet, "Turn away from me, I will weep bitterly; labour not to comfort me" (Is. xxii. 4),—this seems to be the time; yet even this "valley of Achor² is not without a door of hope" (Hos. ii. 15). A vicious person may be

* The valley of *trouble*, out of which the Israelites found "a door of hope," when their troubles were followed by signal victories. See Joshua vii. 26, and the next chapter.

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recalled; multitudes have been: so that as long as God continues life, we ought no more to deposit our hope, than to quit our endeavour. Besides, there are few that make this complaint that have not something to balance, or, at least, to lighten it. I shall instance in that relation which is the nearest and most tender.-that of a parent. He that has one bad child may have divers good. If he have but one virtuous, it is a very great mercy; and it is another, that he may be the better taught to value it by the opposition of the contrary. But if any be so unhappy as to have many children, and " all to consume his eyes and grieve his heart" (1 Sam. ii. 33), it may be a seasonable reflection for him to examine how far he has contributed to it, either by Eli's fond indulgence, or by a remiss and careless education, or, which is worst of all, by his own impious example. If any or all of these be found the cause, he is not so much to seek for allays to his grief as for pardon of his sin. And when he has penitently retracted his own faults, he may then have better ground of hope that God may reform those of his children. In the meantime, he may look on his own affliction in them as God's discipline on him, and gather at least this comfort from it, that his heavenly Father has more care of him than he had of his, and does not leave him uncorrected.

12. Thus we see, in all the concerns which are the most common and important of human life, and wherein the justest of our complaints are usually founded, there is such a temperature and mixture, that the good does more than equal the ill. and that not only in the grosser bulk, when our whole state is weighed together, but in every single branch of it: God having herein dealt with this little world man, as he has done with the greater, wherein he is observed to have furnished every country with specific remedies for their peculiar diseases. I have only given these short hints by way of essay and pattern for the reader's contemplation, which, when he shall have extended to all those more minute' particulars wherein he is especially concerned, more curiously compared his sufferings with his allays and comforts, -I cannot doubt but he will own himself an instance of the truth of the present thesis, and confess that he has much more cause of thankfulness than complaint.

13. This I say, supposing his afflictions to be of those more solid and considerable sorts I have before mentioned. But how many are there who have few or none of such, who seem to be seated in the land of Goshen—in a place exempt from all the plagues that infest their neighbours? And those, one would think, should give a ready suffrage to this conclusion, as having no temptation to oppugn it. Yet I doubt it is far otherwise, and that such men are, of all, the most unsatisfied. For though they have no crosses of God's imposing, they usually create a multitude to themselves. And

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here we may say with David, " It is better to fall into the hand of God than into the hand of man" (2 Sam. xxiv. 14): it is easier to bear the afflictions God sends than those we make to ourselves. His are limited both for quantity and quality, but our own are as boundless as those extravagant desires from which they spring.

14. And this is the true cause why contentment is so much a stranger to those who have all the outward causes of it,-they have no definite measure of their desires. It is not the supply of all their real wants will serve their turn; their appetites are precarious, and depend upon contingen-They hunger not because they are empty, cies. but because others are full. Many a man would have liked his own portion well enough, had he not seen another have something he liked better. Nay, even the most inconsiderable things acquire a value by being another's, when we despise much greater of our own. Ahab might well have satisfied himself with the kingdom of Israel, had not Naboth's poor plot lain in his eye; but so raving were his desires after it, that he disrelishes all the pomps of a crown, yea the ordinary refreshment of nature---" can eat no bread," till he have that to furnish him with salads (1 Kings xxi. 2). And how many are there now-a-days whose clothes sit uneasy, if they see another have had but the luck to be a little more ingeniously vain; whose meat is unsavoury, if they have seen but a greater rarity, a newer cookery,

at another's table; in a word, who make other people's excesses the standard of their own felicities!

15. Nor are our appetites only excited thus by our outward objects, but precipitated and hurried on by our inward lusts. The proud man so longs for homage and adoration, that nothing can please him, if that be wanting. Haman can find no gust in all the sensualities of the Persian court, because a poor despicable Jew denies his obeisance (Esth. v. 13). The lustful so impatiently pursues his impure designs, that any difficulty he meets in them makes him pine and languish like Amnon, who could no way recover his own health but by violating his sister's honour (2 Sam. xiii. 14). The revengeful labours under an hydropic⁸ thirst till he have the blood of his enemy; all the liquor of Absolom's sheep-shearing could not quench his, without the slaughter of his brother (2 Sam. xiji. 29). And thus every one of our passions keeps us upon the rack till they have obtained their designs; nay, when they have, the very emptiness of those acquisitions is a new torment, and puts us upon fresh pursuits. Thus, between the impetuousness of our desires and the emptiness of our enjoyments, we still "disquiet ourselves in vain" (Ps. xxxix. 7). And whilst we have such cruel taskmasters, it is not strange to find us groaning under our burdens. If we will indulge all our vicious or foolish appetites, think our lives bound up with them, and so-

* Hydropic,---dropsical.

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licit the satisfaction of them with as impatient a vehemence as Rachel did for children, "give me them, or I die" (Gen. xxx. 1),—no wonder that we are always complaining of disappointments, since in these the very success is a defeat, and is but the exchanging the pain of a craving ravenous stomach for that of a cloyed and nauseated. Indeed, men of this temper condemn themselves to a perpetual restlessness; they are like fantastic mutineers, who, when their superiors send them blanks to write their own conditions, know not what will please them; and even Omnipotence itself cannot satisfy these till it have new moulded them and reduced their desires to a certainty.

16. But in the meantime how unjustly do they accuse God of illiberality, because every thing answers not their humour ! He has made them reasonable creatures, and has provided them satisfactions proportionable to their nature; but if they will have wild irrational expectations, neither his wisdom nor his goodness is concerned to satisfy those. His supplies are real and solid, and therefore have no correspondence to imaginary wants. If we will create such to ourselves, why do we not create an imaginary satisfaction to them? It were the merrier frenzy of the two to be like the mad Athenian, that thought all the ships that came into the harbour his own; and it were better, Ixion like, to have our arms filled with a cloud, than to have them perpetually beating our own breasts, and be

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still tormenting ourselves with unsatisfiable desires. Yet this is the state to which men voluntarily subject themselves, and then quarrel at God because they will not let themselves be happy. But sure their very complaints justify God, and argue that he has dealt very kindly with them, and afforded them all the necessary accommodations of life; for did they want them, they would not be so sensible of the want of the other. He that is at perfect case may feel with some vexation the biting of a fica or gnat, which would not be at all observable if he were upon the rack. And should God change the scene, and make these nice people feel the destitution of necessaries, all these regrets about superfluities would be overwhelmed. In the meantime, how deplorable a thing is it, that we are still the poorer for God's bounty,-that those to whom he has opened his hand widest should open their mouth so too in outcries and murmurs! For I think I may say, that generally those that are the farthest removed from want are so from content too; they take no notice of all the real substantial blessings they enjoy; leave these (like the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness) forgotten and neglected, to go in quest after some fugitive satisfaction, which, like a shadow, flies still faster in proportion to their pursuit.

17. And now, would God they could be recalled from this unprofitable chase, and instead of the horseleech's note, "Give, give" (Prov. xxx. 15), take up that of the Psalmist, "What shall I render

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to the Lord for all the benefits he hath done unto me?" (Ps. cxvi. 12.) Let them count how many valuable, or rather inestimable, things they have received from his mercy, and then confront them with those corrections they have found from his justice; and if they do this impartially, I doubt not they will find wherewithal to check their highest mutinies, and will join with me in confessing that their good things abundantly outweigh their ill.

18. If now we carry on the comparison to the last circumstance, and consider the constancy, we shall find as wide a difference. Let us take the Psalmist's testimony, and there will appear a very distant date of his mercies and punishments : " His mercies endure for ever" (Ps. cxxxvi.); whereas his wrath "endures but the twinkling of an eve" (Ps. xxx. 5). And accordingly God owns his acts of severity as his "strange work" (Is. xxviii. 21), that which he resorts to only upon special emergencies; but his mercies "are renewed every morning" (Lam. iii. 23). And doubtless we may all upon trial affirm the same. There are many of the most necessary comforts of life which do not only sometimes visit us as guests, but dwell with us as inmates and domestics. How many are there who have lived in a perpetual affluence from their cradles to their graves-have never known what it is to And though the goods of fortune are, perwant! haps, less constant to some, yet the refreshments of nature are usually so to us all. We eat and drink,

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we sleep, we recreate, we converse in a continued circle, and go our round almost as constantly as the sun does his. Or if God does sometimes a little interrupt us in it-put some short restraint upon our refreshments,---yet that, comparatively to the time we enjoy them, is but proportionable to the stop he has sometimes made of the sun (Jos. x. 13; 2 Kings xx. 8), or of the sea (Ex. xiv. 21), which, as they were no subversions of the course of nature, so neither are those short pauses he sometimes makes, a repeal of those fixed and customary benefits his providence usually allots us. But who is there can say that any one of his afflictions has been of equal continuance, or has pressed him with so few intermissions? Perhaps he may have missed some few nights' sleep; but what is that to a twelve month's, or perhaps a whole life's enjoying it? It is possible his stomach and his meat have not always been ready together; but how much oftener have they met to his delight? and generally those things that are most useful are but rarely interrupted. Nay, to a great many even the delicacies of life are no less constant, and their luxuries are as daily as their bread; whereas, unless their vices or their fancies create uneasinesses to them, those that come immediately from God's hand make long intermissions and short stays. Yet for all this, they that should measure by the incessantness of men's complaints would judge that the scene was quite reversed, and that our good things are, as

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Job speaks, "swifter than a weaver's shuttle" (Job vii. 6); whilst our ills, like Gehazi's leprosy, "cleave inseparably to us" (2 Kings v. 27).

19. The truth is, we will not let ourselves enjoy those intervals God allows us; but when a calamity does retire, we will still keep it in fiction and imagination, revolve it in our minds, and because it is possible it may return, look upon it as not gone. Like aguish patients, we count ourselves sick on our well-day, because we expect a fit the next. A strange stupid folly thus to court vexation, and be miserable in chimera. Does any man, or indeed any beast, desire to keep a distasteful relish still in his mouth, to chew the cud upon gall and wormwood? Yet certainly there are a multitude of people whose lives are embittered to them merely by these fantastic imaginary sufferings. Nor do we only fright ourselves with images and ideas of past calamities, but we dress up new bugbears and mormoes,1 are poetic and aërial in our inventions, and lay romantic scenes of distresses. This is a thing very incident to jealous natures, who are always raising alarms to themselves. A suspicious man looks on every body with dread. One man he fears has designs upon his fortune, another on his reputation, perhaps a third upon his life; whilst, in the meantime, the only ill design against him is managed by himself, his own causeless fears and jealousies, which put him in a state of hostility with all the world,

¹ Mormo,-bugbear, false terror.

and do often betray him to the very things he groundlessly suspected; for it is not seldom seen that men have incurred real mischiefs by a fond solicitude of avoiding imaginary ones. I do not question but this is a state calamitous enough, and shall acknowledge it very likely that such persons shall have little or no truce from their troubles, who have such an unexhausted spring within themselves; yet we may say to them as the prophet did to the house of Jacob, "Is the spirit of the Lord straitened? are these his doings?" (Mic. ii. 7.) Such men must not cry out that God's hand lies heavy upon them, but their own; and so can be no impeachment to the truth of our observations, that God's blessings are of a longer duration, keep a more fixed steady course than his punishments. The result of all is, that the generality of mankind have good things (even as to temporals), which do in the three respects forementioned exceed the ill. I mean the true and real ills which God sends, though not those fanciful ones they raise to themselves.

20. And now why should it not appear a reasonable proposition, that men should entertain themselves with the pleasanter parts of God's dispensations to them, and not always pore upon the harsher; especially since the former are so much a fairer object, and perpetually in their eye, why should we look on the more saddening spectacles of human frailty or misfortune through all the magnifying optics our fancies can supply, and perversely turn

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away our eyes from the cheerfuler? Yet this, God knows, is too much the case with most of us. How nicely and critically do we observe every little adverse accident of our lives; what tragical stories of them do our memories present us with, when, alas, a whole current of prosperity glides by without our notice! Like little children, our fingers are never off the sore place, till we have picked every little scratch into an ulcer. Nay, like the lewder sort of beggars, we make artificial sores, to give us a pretence of complaint. And can we then expect God should concern himself in the cure? Indeed. in the course of his ordinary providence, there is no cure for such people, unless it be by revulsion, the making them feel the smart of some very great and pressing affliction. They therefore put themselves under an unhappy dilemma, either to continue their own tormentors, or to endure the severest course of God's discipline. It is true the last is the more eligible; but I am sure the best way is to prevent both, by a just and grateful sense of God's mercies, which will be yet farther illustrated if we compare them with our own demerits.





CHAPTER V.

OF OUR DEMERIT TOWARDS GOD.



T is the common fault of our nature, that we are very apt to be partial to ourselves, and to square our expectations more by what we wish than by what

we deserve. Something of this is visible in our dealings with men. We oft "look to reap where we have not sown" (Matt. xxv. 26), expect benefits where we do none: yet in civil transactions there are still remaining such footsteps of natural justice, that we are not universally so unreasonable; all traffic and commerce subsisting upon the principle of equal retribution, giving one good thing for another equivalent; so that no man expects to buy corn with chaff, or gold with dross. But in our dealings with God we put off even this common equity, are vast in our expectations, but penurious and base in our returns; and as if God were our steward, not our Lord, we require of him, with a confidence proper only to those who ask their own: whilst in the interim, what we offer to him is with such a disdainful slightness, as if we meant it rather an alms than an homage.

2. God is indeed so munificent, that he "prevents us with his blessings" (Ps. xxi. 3), gives us many things before we ask : had he not done so, we could not have been so much as in a capacity of asking. But though the first and fundamental mercies are absolute and free, yet the subsequent are conditional; and accordingly we find in Scripture, that God makes no promise either concerning this life or a better, but on condition of obedience. The Jews, who had much larger proposals of temporal happiness than Christians have, yet never had them upon other terms. God expressly articled for the performance of his commands, and made all their enjoyments forfeitable upon the failure,-as we may see at large in the book of Deuteronomy. And under the Gospel. St. Paul appropriates the "promises as well of this life as of that to come" unto godliness (1 Tim. iv. 8). It will therefore be a material inquiry for every man, whether he have kept his title entire, and have not, by breach of the condition, forfeited his claim even to the most common ordinary blessings: for if he have, common reason will tell him he can challenge none; and that the utmost he can hope for must be only upon a new score of unmerited favour.

3. And here certainly "every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God" (Rom. iii. 19). For, alas, who is there that can say his obedience has been in any degree proportionable to his obligation? It is manifest we have all received abundantly from God's hand; but what has he had from ours? I may challenge the best man to cast up the account of his best day. and tell me whether his receipts have not infinitely exceeded his disbursements; whether, for any one good thing he has done, he has not received many. Nor is the disparity only in number, but much more in value. God's works are perfect, all he does for us, like the first six days' productions, "are all very good" (Gen. i.); but, alas, our very " righteousness is as filthy rags" (Is. lxiv. 6). We offer him "the blind and the lame" (Mal. i. 8); a few yawning, drowsy prayers perhaps, wherein he has the least share; the fuller current of our thoughts running towards our secular or sinful concerns. We drop, it may be, a scanty alms, wherein it is odds our vainglory scrambles for a share with him, if it do not wholly engross it. We sit an hour at a sermon, but it is rather to hear the wit or eloquence of the preacher than the word of God. Like the duller sort of animals, we like well to have our itching ears scratched; but grow sturdy and restive when we should do what we are there taught. In a word, all our services at the best are miserably maimed and imperfect, and too often corrupt and unsound.

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So that God may well upbraid us as he did Israel, "Offer it now to thy governor, will he be pleased with it?" (Mal. i. 8.) These very iniquities of our holy things are enough to defeat all our pretences to any good from God's hand. Yet, God knows, this is much the best side of us; it is not every one that can make so fair an appearance as this amounts With many there is no place to complain of to. the blemishes of their sacrifices, for they offer none: of whom we may say, in the words of the Psalmist, "God is not in all their thoughts" (Ps. x. 4). I fear there want not those who drive away the day, the week, nay, the year, without remembering in whose "hand their time is" (Ps. xxxi. 17), or paying him any solemn tribute of it; who enjoy the services of all inferior creatures without considering that theirs are more due to the supreme Lord; in a word, who live as if they were absolutely independent, had their existence purely from themselves, and had no Creator, to whom they owed their being, or any consequent duty. And sure men who thus discard themselves from God's family have very little reason to expect the provisions of it : yet even such as these have the impudence to complain, if any thing be wanting to their needs (shall I say?), or to their lusts; can ravingly profane God's name in their impatiences, which they know not how to use in their prayers,-as if the Deity were considerable in no other notion than that of their caterer or steward.

4. If, now, we seriously reflect, what can be more admirable than that infinite patience of God, who, notwithstanding the miserable infirmities of the pious, and the lewd contempt of the impious, still goes on resolutely in his bounty, and continues to all mankind some, and to some all his temporal blessings I He has no obligation of justice to do so, for it is no part of his compact; he has none of gratitude, for he is perpetually affronted and disobliged. Surely we may well say with David, "Is this after the manner of men, O Lord?" (2 Sam. vii. 19.) Can the highest human indulgence bear any proportion with this Divine clemency? No, certainly; no finite patience but would be exhausted with the thousandth part of our provocations.

5. But is not our dealing, too, as little after the manner of men — I mean of reasonable creatures? For us, who have forfeited our right to all, and yet by mere favour are still kept in the possession of many great blessings,— for us to grow mutinous, because there is perhaps something more trifling which is denied us, is such a stupid ingratitude as one would think impossible to human nature. Should a tenant with us have at once forfeited his lease and maliciously affronted his landlord, he would sure think himself very gently dealt with, if he were suffered to enjoy but a part of his first estate; but we should think him not only insolent, but mad, who, when the whole were left him, should quarrel and clamour if he might not have his cottage

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adorned with marble floors and gilded roofs. Yet at this wild rate we behave ourselves to our great Landlord; grow pettish and angry, if we have not every thing we can fancy, though we enjoy many more useful, merely by his indulgence. And can there be any thing imagined more unreasonable? Let us therefore, if not for piety, yet at least to justify our claim to rationality, be more ingenuous; let us not consult only with our fond appetites, and be thus perpetually soliciting their satisfaction; but rather reflect on what tenure we hold what we already have, even that of superabundant mercy; and fear lest, like insolent beggars, by the impudence of our demands, we divert even that charity which was designed us. In short, let every man when he computes what he wants of his desires reckon as exactly how much he is short of his duty; and when he has duly pondered both, he will think it a very gentle composition to have the one unsupplied, so he may have the other remitted; and will see cause contentedly to sit down and say with honest Mephibosheth, "What right have I to cry any more unto the king?" (2 Sam. xix. 28.) But if it be thus with us upon the mere score of our imperfections or omissions, what an obnoxious state do our innumerable actual sins put us in ! If the spots of our sacrifices are provoking, what are our sacrileges and bold profanations? If those who neglect or forget God are listed among his enemies, what are those who avowedly defy him? Indeed, he that

soberly considers the world, and sees how daringly the divine Majesty is daily affronted, cannot but wonder that the perversions of our manners, those prodigies in morality, should not be answered with as great prodigies in calamity too; that we should ever have other ruin than that of Sodom, or the earth serve us for any other purpose than to be, as it was to Korah (Numb. xvi.), our living sepulchre.

6. Nor is this forhearance of God observable only towards the mass and collective body of mankind, but to every man in particular. Who is there that, if he ransack his conscience, shall not find guilts enough to justify God in the utmost severities towards him: so that how much soever his punishments are short of that, so much he evidently owes to the lenity and compassion of God? And who is there that suffers in this world the utmost that God can inflict? We have a great many suffering capacities; and if those were all filled up to the height, our condition would scarce differ from that of the damned in any thing but duration. But God is more merciful, and never inflicts at that rate on us here. Every man's experience can tell him that God discharges not his whole quiver at once upon him, but exempts him in many more particulars than he afflicts him; and yet the same experience will probably tell most or us that we are not so modest in our assaults upon God; we attack him in all his concerns (as far as our feeble malice can reach)-in his sovereignty, in

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his honour, in his relatives, nay, sometimes in his very essence and being. And as they are universal in respect of him, so also in regard of ourselves; we engage all our powers in this war; do not only "vield," as the apostle speaks, "our members instruments of unrighteousness" (Rom. vi. 18), but we press them upon the service of sensual and vile lusts even beyond our native propensions. Nor are only the members of our body, but the faculties of our souls also thus employed. Our understandings are busied first in contriving sins, and then excuses and disguises for them. Our wills are yet more sturdy rebels; and when the understanding is beat out of all its outworks, yet sullenly keep their hold in spite of all conviction; and our affections madly rush on, "like the horse into the battle" (Jer. viii. 6), deterred by nothing of danger, so there be but sin enough in the attempt.

7. And now with what face can people that thus pursue an hostility expect that it should not be returned to them? Does any man denounce war, and yet expect from his adversary all the caresses, the obligements of friendship? Self-defence will prompt even the meekest nature to despoil his enemy at least of those things which he uses to his annoyance; and if God should give way even to that lowest degree of anger, where or what were we? for since we employ our whole selves against him, nothing but destruction can avert our injuries. But it is happy for us we have

to do with One who cannot fear us; who knows the impotence of our wild attempts, and so allays his resentment of our insolence with his pity of our follies. Were it not for this, we should not be left in a possibility so oft to iterate our provocations; every wicked imagination and black design would be at once defeated and punished by infatuation and frenzy; every blasphemous atheistical speech would wither the tongue, like that " arm" of Jeroboam which he stretched against the prophet (2 Kings xiii. 4); and every impious act would, like the prohibited retrospect of Lot's wife, fix us perpetual monuments of Divine vengeance.

8. And, then, how much do we owe to the mercy and commiseration of our God, that "he suffers not his whole displeasure to arise" (Ps. lxxviii. 39); that he abates any thing of that just severity he might use toward us! He that is condemned to the gallows would think it a mercy to escape with any inferior penalty: why have we, then, such mean thoughts of God's clemency when he descends to such low compositions with us, corrects us so lightly, as if it were only matter of ceremony and punctilio, the regard of his honour, rather than the execution of his wrath? For, alas, let him among us that is the most innocent, and undeservedly afflicted, muster up his sins and sufferings, and he will see a vast inequality; and (had he not other grounds of assurance) would be almost tempted to think those were not the provoking cause, they are

so unproportionably answered! He sins in innumerable instances, and is punished in few; he sins habitually and perpetually, and suffers rarely and seldom; nay, perhaps he has sometimes sinned with greediness, and yet God has punished with regret and reluctancy. "How shall I give thee up, O Ephraim?" (Hos. xi. 8.) And when all the disparities are considered, we must certainly join heartily in Ezra's confession, "Thou, O God, hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra ix. 13).

9. Nay, besides all our antecedent, we have after-guilts no less provoking; I mean our ungracious repinings at the light chastisements of our former sins; our outcries upon every little uneasiness, which may justly cause God to turn our whips into scorpions, and, according as he threatened Israel, "to punish us yet seven times more" (Lev. xxvi. 18). And yet even this does not immediately exasperate him. The Jews were an instance how long he could bear with a murmuring generation; but certainly we of this nation are a greater : yet " let us not be high-minded, but fear" (Rom. xi. 20); for we see at last the doom fell heavy, though it was protracted; a succession of miraculous judgments pursued those murmurers, so that not one of them entered Canaan. And it is very observable, that whereas to other sins God's denunciations are in Scripture conditional and reversible, this was absolute, and bound with an oath; " He sware in his wrath, that they should not

enter into his rest" (Ps. xcv. 11). And yet if we compare the hardships of the Israelites in the wilderness with most of our sufferings, we shall be forced to confess our mutinies have less temptation, and consequently less excuse; from whence it is very reasonable to infer, as the greatness of our danger if we persist, so the greatness of God's longsuffering towards us, who yet allows us space to reform : and sure new complaints sound very ill from us, who are liable to so severe an account for our old ones. I fear the most resigned persons of us will upon recollection find they have upon one occasion or other outvied the number of the Israelites' murmurs: therefore, unless we will emulate them in their plagues, let us fear to add one more, lest that make up the fatal sum, and render our destruction irrevocable.

10. Upon all these considerations, it appears how little reason any of us have to repine at our heaviest pressures. But there is yet a farther circumstance to be adverted to, and is too applicable to many of us; that is, that our sins are not only the constant meritorious cause of our sufferings, but they are also very often the instrumental cause also, and produce them not only by way of retaliation from God, but by a natural efficacy. Solomon tells us, he that "loves pleasure shall be a poor man" (Prov. xxi. 17); and that "a whorish woman will bring a man to a piece of bread" (vi. 26); that "he that sits long at the wine shall have red-

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ness of eyes" (xxiii. 29, 30); that "the slothful soul shall suffer hunger" (xix. 15); and all these, not by immediate supernatural infliction from God, but as the proper genuine effects of those respective vices. Indeed, God in his original establishment of things has made so close a connexion between sin and punishment, that he is not often put to exert his power in any extraordinary way, but may trust us to be our own lictors :¹ our own " backslidings reprove us" (Jer. ii. 19); " and our iniquities are" of themselves enough to " become our ruin" (Ezek. xviii. 30).

11. It may, therefore, be a seasonable question for every man to put to himself, whether the troubles he labours under be not of this sort : whether the poverty he complains of be not the effect of his riot and profusion, his sloth and negligence; whether when he cries out that " his comeliness is turned into corruption" (Dan. x. 8), he may not answer himself, that they are his visits to the harlot's house, which have thus made " rottenness enter into his bones" (Hab. iii. 16); whether when he is beset with contentions, and has wounds without cause, " he have not tarried long at the wine;" when he has lost his friend, whether he have not by some "treacherous wound" (Ecclus. xxii. 22) forced him to depart; or when he lies under infamy, whether it be not only the echo of his own scandalous

¹ Lictors were Roman officers employed (like our beadles or constables) to apprehend and punish criminals.

crimes. If he find it thus with him, certainly his mouth is stopped, and he cannot, without the most disingenuous impudence, complain of any but himself. He could not be ignorant that such effects do naturally attend such causes; and therefore if he would take the one, he must take the other also. No man sure can be so mad as to think God should work miracles (disunite those things which nature hath conjoined), only that he may sin at ease, have all the bestial pleasures he can project, and none of the consequent smart. We read, indeed, God divided the sea; but it was to make "the way for the ransomed of the Lord to pass over" (Is. li. 10), those who were his own people, and went in at his command; but when they were secured, we find the waters immediately returned to their channel, and overwhelmed the Egyptians, who ventured without the same warrant. And sure the case is alike here: when any man can produce God's mandate for him to run into all excess of riot, to desegrate the temple of the Holy Ghost, "and make his body the member of an harlot" (1 Cor. vi. 15); in a word, when God bids him do any of those things which God and good men abhor, then, and not before, he may hope he may sever such acts from their native penal effects; for till then (how profuse soever some legendary stories represent him) he will certainly never so bestow his miracles.

12. But I fear, upon scrutiny, there will appear a yet farther circumstance upon which to arraign our

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mutinies; for though it be unreasonable enough to charge God with the ill effect of our own lewdness, yet it is a higher step to murmur because we have not materials to be wicked enough. And this I fear is the case with too many of us, who, though they are not so despoiled by their sins, but that they can keep up their round of vicious pleasures, yet are discontented because they think some others have them more exquisite, think their vices are not genteel enough unless they be very expensive, and are covetous only that they may be more luxurious. These are such as St. James speaks of, who "ask amiss, that they may consume it upon their lusts" (James iv. 3); and sure to be mutinous on this account is one of the highest pieces of frenzy. Would any man in his wits tell another he will cut his throat, and then expect he should furnish him with a knife for it? And yet to this amount our murmurs against God for his not giving us those things wherewith we only design to wage war with him; for surely if the discontents of mankind were closely inspected, I doubt a great many would be found of this kind. It concerns the reader, therefore, to make the inquisition in his own breast, both in this and all the former particulars; and I doubt not, if he do it with any ingenuity and uprightness, he will be abundantly convinced that for his few mites of obedience he pays to God, he receives talents of mercies (even temporal) from him; and that on the other side, God as much underpays his sins as

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he overpays his services : by which God does sufficiently attest how little he delights in our affliction, how gladly he takes any light occasion of caressing and cherishing, and overskips those of punishing us; which sure ought to make us convert all our displeasures against our sins, which extort those acts of severity from him to which his nature is And here, indeed, our resentments most averse. cannot be too sharp; but towards God our fittest address will be in the penitential form of the prophet Daniel, "O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face; but to the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him" (Dan. ix. 8, 9). And as his justice is to be revered in his inflictions, so is his wisdom also in so disposing of events to particular persons as may best consist with the universal economy and management of the world; the consideration whereof is the design of the next chapter.





CHAPTER VI.

OF GOD'S GENERAL PROVIDENCE.



tended not only to glorify himself in one transient act of his power, and then leave this great and wonderful

production of his, as the "ostrich her eggs" in the wilderness (Lam. iv. 3); but having drawn it out of its first chaos, he secured it from returning thither again by establishing as a due symmetry of parts, so also a regular order of motion; hence it is that the heavens have their constant revolutions, the earth its succession of determinate seasons, animals their alternate course of generation and corruption; and by this wise economy, the world, after so many thousand years, seems still in its spring and first beauty. But it had been in vain to have thus secured against the defection of the creatures, if man, for whose sake they were made, had been excluded from this care. His faculty of reason would have made him but the more fatal instrument of confusion, and taught him the more compendious ways of disturbing the world. Job compares him to the "wild ass's colt" (Job xi. 12), which takes its range without adverting to any thing of the common good. God has, therefore, doubly hedged in this unruly creature, made a fence of laws about him (both natural and positive); and besides has taken him into the common circle of his providence; so that he, as well as the rest of the creation, has his particular station assigned him : and that not only in reference to other creatures, but himself; has put a difference between one man and another, ordained several ranks and classes of men, and endowed them with special and appropriate qualifications for those stations wherein he has set them.

2. This, as it is a work of infinite wisdom in God, so it is of unspeakable advantage to men. Without this regular disposure, the world would have been in the same confusion which we read of in the host of the Midianites, "every man's sword against his fellow" (Judges vii. 22). Nothing but force could determine who should do or enjoy any thing; and even that decision also would have been repealable by a greater force; so that we have all reason to confess the utility of that order God has set among men; and even he that bears the lowest and most despicable place in it is certainly infinitely more happy by contributing to that general harmony than he could be in any state of discord.

3. Were this now well considered, methinks it

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should silence all our complaints, and men should not be so vehemently concerned in what part of the structure it pleases the great Architect to put them; for every man is to look on himself only as a small parcel of those materials which God is to put into Every stone is not fit for the corner, nor form. every little rafter for the main beam; the wisdom of the Master-builder is alone to determine that. And sure there cannot be a more vile contempt of the Divine Wisdom than to dispute his choice. Had God wisdom enough to contrive this vast and beautiful fabric, and may he not be trusted with one of us poor worms? Did he by his "wisdom make the heavens, and by his understanding stretch out the clouds" (Prov. iii. 19), and shall he not know where to place a little lump of figured earth? This is certainly the most absurd distrust imaginable; and yet this is really the true meaning of our repining at the condition he has placed us in.

4. The truth is, we are so full of ourselves that we can see nothing beyond it; every man expects God should place him where he has a mind to be, though by it he discompose the whole scheme of his providence. But though we are so senselessly partial, yet God is not so: he that comprehends at once the whole concerns of mankind, applies himself to the accommodating those, not the humouring any particular person. "He has made the great and the small, and careth for all alike" (Wis. vi. 7). He is the common Father of mankind, and disposes things for the public advantage of this great family; and it is not all the impatient cravings of a froward child that shall make him recede from his designed method. We are apt enough, I am sure, to tax it not only as a weakness but injustice too in a prince when he indulges any thing to a private favourite to the public disadvantage; yet so unequal are we, that we murmur at God for not doing that which we murmur at men for doing.

5. Besides, a man is to consider that other men have the same appetites with himself. If he dislike an inferior state, why should he not think others do so too? and then, as the wise man speaks, "whose voice shall the Lord hear?" (Ecclus. xxxiv. 24.) It is sure great insolence in me to expect that God should be more concerned to humour me than those multitudes of others who have the same desires. And the more impatient my longings are, the less in reason should be my hopes; for mutiny is no such endearing quality as to render any man a darling to God. But if all men should have equal satisfactions, we should puzzle even Omnipotence itself. Every man would be above and superior, yet those are comparative terms; and if no man were below, no man could be above. So in wealth, most men desire more, but every man does at least desire to keep what he has; how then shall one part of the world be supplied without the diminu-

tion of the other, unless there should be as miraculous a multiplication of treasure for man's avarice, as there was of loaves for their hunger? (Matt. xvi. 9.) It was a good answer which the ambassadors of an oppressed province made to Antony: "If, O emperor, thou wilt have double taxes from us, thou must help us to double springs and harvests." And sure God must be at the expense of a new creation, make us a double world, if he should oblige himself to satisfy all the unreasonable appetites of men; and if he satisfy not all, why should any particular person look that his alone should be indulged to?

6. Yet, as unreasonable as it is, the most of us do betray such a persuasion. No man is discontented that there are lower as well as higher degrees in the world,---that there are poor as well as rich,--but all sensible men assent to the fitness of it : yet if themselves happen to be set in the lower form, they exclaim, as if the whole order of the world were subverted; which is a palpable indication that they think that Providence, which governs others, should serve them, and distribute to them not what it but themselves think good. This immoderate self-love is the spring and root of most of our complaints, makes us such unequal judges in our own concerns, and prompts us to put in caveats and exceptions on our own behalf, as David did on his son's, " See that thou hurt not the young man Absalom" (2 Sam.

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xviii. 5); as if God were to manage the government of the world with a particular regard to our liking, and were, like the angels at Sodom (Gen. xix. 22), to "do nothing till we had got into Zoar," — had all our demands secured to us.

7. It would indeed astonish a considering man to see, that although the concerns of men are all disposed by an unerring Wisdom, and acknowledged by themselves to be so, yet that scarce any man is The truth is, we have generally in us the pleased. worse part of the leveller's principle; and though we can very contentedly behold multitudes below us, yet are impatient to see any above us; not only " the foot" (to use the apostle's simile) " complains that it is not the hand, but the ear because it is not the eye" (1 Cor. xii. 15, 16). Not only the lowermost, but the higher ranks of men are uneasy, if there be any one step above them. Nay, so importunate is this aspiring humour, that we see men are forced to feed it, though but with air and shadows. He that cannot make any real advance in his quality, will yet do it in effigy, in all little gaieties and pa-Every degree, in these respects, geantries of it. not only emulates but imitates its superior, till at last, by that impatience of their proper distance, they make it greater, and sink even below their first state by their ridiculous profusion. Indeed, the world seems to be so overrun with this vanity, that there is little visible distinction of degrees; and

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one had need go to the herald's office to know men's qualities; for neither their habit nor equipage do now-a-days inform us with any certainty.

8. But by all this it appears that men look on themselves only as single persons, without reference to the community whereof they are members. For did they consider that, they would endeavour rather to become the places wherein they were set, by doing the duties belonging to them, than be perpetually projecting for a change. A tree that is every year transplanted will never bear fruit : and a mind that is always hurried from its proper station will scarce ever do good in any. This is excellently expressed to us by Solomon, "As a bird that wandereth from his nest, so is a man that wandereth from his place" (Prov. xxvii. 8). It is easy to divine the fate of those young ones from whom the dam wanders; and it is as easy to guess how the duties of that place will be performed, whose owner is always upon the wing and making towards another I wish we had not too costly experiments, both in Church and State, of the truth of this observation. Alas, we forget that we are all servants to the same Master, and that he is to appoint in what office we shall serve him! How should we like it in any of our own families, to have an inferior officer leave his work undone, because he has more mind to be major-domo? Yet this insolence we every day repoat towards God, sullenly dispute his order, and,

unless we may choose our own employments, will do nothing.

9. It is evident this perverse temper of mankind breeds a great deal of mischief and disturbance in the world, but would breed arrant confusion and subversion if it were suffered to have its full range. If God permit but one ambitious spirit to break loose in an age, as the instrument of his wrath, what destruction does it oftentimes make ! how does it "cause the whole earth to tremble, and shake kingdoms!" as is said of Nebuchadnezzar (Is. xiv. 16), and may be said of many others of those wholesale robbers who have dignified the trade. But if every aspiring humour should be as prosperous, where would it find fuel to maintain the flame? No doubt every age produces men of as unbounded desires as Alexander or Cæsar, but God gives them not the same opportunities to trouble the world: and accordingly, in the more petty ambitions of private men, he often orders it so that those soaring minds can find no benign gale to help their mounting. He that sets bounds to the sea, saying, "Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther; and though the waves thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail; though they roar, yet can they not pass over" (Jer. v. 22), -does also depress the swelling pride of men, hangs clogs and weights upon them, that they cannot rise to their affected height. For though we are all willing to forget it, yet God remembers

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that he is the Rector of the universe, and will assert his dominion. The subtilest contrivance cannot circumvent him, the most daring pretender cannot wrest any thing out of his hand; " the Lord will still be King, be the people never so impatient" (Ps. xcix. 1). It will therefore sure be as well our prudence as our duty, to "be still and know that he is God" (Ps. xlvi. 10), with an humble dereliction of our own wills acquiesce in his, and not by ineffective strugglings provoke, whom we are sure never to subdue. We may, like unmanaged horses, foam and fret, but still God has the bridle in our jaws, and we cannot advance a step farther than he permits us. Why should we then create torment to ourselves by our repinings, which only sets us farther from our aims? It is God's declared method to exalt the lowly ; and it is observable in the first two kings of Israel, who were of God's immediate election, that he surprised them with that dignity when they were about mean and humble employments,-the one searching his father's asses, the other keeping his father's sheep : and would men honestly and diligently exercise themselves in the business of their proper calling, they might perhaps find it a more direct road to advancement than all the sinister arts by which ambitious men endeavour to climb. Solomon sets it down as an aphorism, " Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men" (Prov. xxii. 29). But whether it happen to have that effect

or no, it will have a better; for it will sweeten his present condition, divert his mind from mutinous reflections on other men's height, and his own lowness; for it is commonly men who mind not their work that are at so much leisure to gaze. He that carefully plies his own business will have his thoughts more concentered : and doubtless it is no small happiness to have them so; for it is their gadding too much abroad, looking on other men's conditions, that sends them back (like Dinah defloured) to put all in an uproar at home. The son of Sirach speaks with transportation of the state even of him that labours and is content, and calls it " a sweet life" (Ecclus. xl. 18); and certainly it is infinitely more so than that of the greatest prince whose mind swells beyond his territories.

10. Upon all these considerations, it cannot but appear very reasonable that we should leave God to govern the world; not be putting in, like the sons of Zebedee, for the highest seats, but continually rest ourselves where he has placed us, till his providence (not our own designs) advance us. We can no where be so obscure as to be hid from His eyes, who, as he valued the widow's mite above the great oblations of the rich, so he will no less graciously accept the humble endeavours of the mean than the more eminent services of the mighty; himself having declared, that he accepts "according to what a man hath, and not according to what he hath not" (2 Cor. viii. 12). So that in what rank soever a

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man is set, he has still the same opportunity of approving himself to God; and though in the eve of the world he be a vessel of dishonour, yet in the day when God comes to "make up his jewels" (Mal. iii. 17), there will be another estimate made of him who regularly moves in his own sphere. And sure he that sits down in this acquiescence is a hap pier man than he that enjoys the greatest worldly splendours, but infinitely more so than he who impatiently covets but cannot attain them : for such a man puts bimself upon a perpetual rack, keeps his appetites up at the utmost stretch, and yet has nothing wherewith to satisfy them. Let therefore our ease, if not our duty, prompt us to acquiescence, and a ready submission to God's disposals; to which we have yet a farther inducement from that distinct care he hath over every man's peculiar, by which . he proportions to him what is really best for him; of which we are farther to consider in the next chapter.





CHAPTER VII.

OF GOD'S PARTICULAR PROVIDENCE.

T is the imperfection of our finite nature that we cannot at once attend to divers things, but the more vehement our intention is upon one, the greater is our

neglect of the rest. But God's infinity cannot be so bounded; his eyes at once see, and his providence at once orders, all the most distant and disparate things in the world. He is not such an Epicurean Deity¹ as to sequester himself wholly to the enjoyment of his own felicity, and to despise the concerns of poor mortals; but though he have his "dwelling so high, yet he humbleth himself to behold the things in heaven and earth" (Ps. cxiii. 5). Nor does his providence confine itself to the more

¹ " Gods in their very nature must enjoy An endless life, and peace without alloy; From man's concerns remov'd and far apart,— From perils free,—free from all grief of heart,— They, self-sufficient, naught of ours can need, Nor more regard the good than evil deed." Lucentrus, book i. 57-62. splendid and greater parts of management, the conduct of empires and states, but it descends to the lowest parts of his creation, to the fowls of the air, to the lilies of the field; and then sure our Saviour's inference as to mankind is irrefragable, "Are ye not much better than they?" (Matt. vi. 26.) If a sparrow (as he elsewhere tells his disciples) cannot fall to the ground without God's particular notice, surely no human creature is less considerable to him; nay, if our very hairs are numbered, we cannot think the excrescence is of more value than the stock, but must conclude that God with a particular advertence watches over the concerns of every man.

2. Now God being infinitely good cannot thus attend us upon any insidious design of doing us mischief; he watches over us as a guardian, not as a spy; and directs his observation to the more seasonable adapting his benefits: and as he is thus gracious in designing our advantage, so he is no less wise in contriving it. " All things," says the wise man, " are not profitable for all men" (Ecclus. xxxvii. 28). Indeed nothing is absolutely good but God; all created things are good or ill in reference to that to which they are applied. Meat is good : but to a surfeited stomach it is not only nauseous but dangerous. Fire is good; but if put in our bosoms, not only burns our clothes but flesh. And as human wisdom directs the right application of these and the like, so the Supreme and Divine orders events according to the disposition of the person concerned; "he knows our frame" (Ps. ciii. 14), and discerns what operation such or such things will have upon us; while we, who know neither ourselves nor them, can make but random guesses and worse choices. And sure he that does but thus in the general acknowledge God's providence, goodness, and wisdom (which he is no Christian who does not), has a sufficient amulet against all his solicitudes, much more his repinings. He cannot think he suffers unawares to Him who sees all things; he cannot think his sufferings are designed for ill to him, because they are disposed by Him who intends and projects his good; nor can he fear those intentions can miscarry, which are guided by an infinite and unerring wisdom, and backed by an uncontrollable power. And sure this is, as the apostle speaks, "strong consolation" (Heb. vi. 18), if we would but duly apply it.

3. Yet, because general notions do often make but light impressions on us, it may not be amiss to make a little more inspection, and to observe how applicable they are to the several kinds of our discontents. Now those may be reduced to two; for either we are troubled at the want of something we desire, or at the suffering of something we would avert; so that the two notions of privative and positive divide between them all our affliction.

4. The first of these is usually the most comprohensive; for there are few who have not more tor-

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ment from the apprehension of somewhat they want than from the smart of any thing they feel; and indeed whilst our desires are so vagrant and exorbitant, they will be sure to furnish matter enough for our discontents; but certainly there is not in the world such a charm for them as the consideration that God is more wise to discern. and more careful to provide what is really good for us than we ourselves. We poor purblind creatures look only on the surface of things; and if we see a beautiful appearance, somewhat that invites our senses, we court it with the utmost earnestness: but God penetrates deeper; he sees to the bottom both of us and those things we desire, and finds often that though they may please our appetite, they will hurt our health; and will no more give them to us than a careful father will to his child those gilded poisons he cries for. Perhaps this man is taken with the enchanting music of fame, likes not his own obscure station, but would fain present himself upon a more public theatre, come into the eve and crowd of the world ; but how little does he know how he shall act his part there --- whether he shall come off with a plaudit or a hiss! He may render himself but the more public spectacle of scorn; or if he do not that, he may by a better success feed up his vainglory to such a bulk as may render him too great weight for that tottering pinnacle whereon he stands; and so after he has made a towering circle, he may fall back with more ignominy to his first

point. Another, it may be, no less eagerly desires wealth, thinks (as once Crœsus¹ did) that he that abounds in treasure cannot be empty of felicity ; but, alas, how knows he how he shall employ it? There are two contrary temptations that attend riches,-riots and covetousness; and he is sure a little too confident that dares promise himself, that when there is such odds against him, he shall certainly choose the one just mean; and if he do not, he does only inflame his account at the great audit. Besides, the more wealth he has, the fairer booty he is to the avarice of others; and it has been often seen, that many a man had not died so poor, if he had lived less rich. Another, perhaps, thinks not himself so much to want wealth as children to heir it, and complains with Abraham, " Lord, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless ?" (Gen. xv. 2); vet how knows he whether that child he so much desires "shall be a wise man or a fool" (Eccles. ii. 19), a comfort or a vexation to himself, if he live to see his proof? and if he do not, he does but project for an access to his dying cares in what hands to leave him. Rachel solicited this satisfaction with the greatest impatience, "Give me children, or I die" (Gen. xxx. 1); and it is observable that the grant of her wish proved the loss of her life (Gen. xxxv. 19).

5. Thus in these and innumerable other instances

¹ See some account of him in Wilberforce's "Five Empires," Englishman's Library, ch. x. p. 75-77.

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we drive on blindfold, and very often impetuously pursue that which would ruin us: and were God as shortsighted as we, into what precipices should we every minute hurry ourselves! or were he so unkind as to consider our importunity more than our interest, we should quickly sink under the weight of our own wishes; and as Juvenal, in his tenth satire, excellently observes, perish by the success and grant of our prayers. I suppose there is no man that soberly recollects the events of his life but can experimentally say, he has sometimes desired things which would have been to his mischief if he had had them, and that himself has after looked on the denial as a mercy; as, on the other side, when he has prospered in his aims, and had what his soul lusted after, it has been but like the quails of the Israelites, a conviction and punishment rather than a satisfaction. And now surely God may complain of us as he did of Israel, "How long will it be ere you believe me?" (Num. xiv. 11.) After all the attestations he has given of his care and providence over us; after all the experiments we have had of the folly of our own elections, we cannot yet be brought either to distrust ourselves, or rely upon him. We will still be choosing, and look on him as no farther concerned than as the executioner of our designs.

6. This is certainly a strange perverseness, and such as no sensible man would be guilty of in any other instance. In all our secular affairs we trust

those whom we have cause to think understand them better than ourselves, and rely upon men in their own faculty. We put our estates in the lawyer's hand, our bodies into the physician's, and submit to their advice, though it be against our humour, merely because we account them more competent judges. Yet this deference we cannot be persuaded to pay to God, but will still be prescribing to him, and are very angry if his dispensations do not exactly answer our fancies. And can we offer him a greater affront than thus to distrust him? What is it but interpretatively to deny either his wisdom or his goodness, or both, and so derogate from him in two of his essential attributes? for there can be no rational account given by any who believe those, why they should not remit their whole concerns to him. So that the short account is, that in our distrusts we either deny him to be God, or ourselves to be men, by resisting the most evident dictates of that reason which distinguishes us from brutes; for certainly there is not in human discourse a more irrefragable maxim, than that we ought for our own sakes to resign ourselves to him, who we are infallibly sure can and will choose better for us than we for ourselves.

7. This was so apparent by mere natural light, that Socrates advised men to pray only for blessings in general, and leave the particular kind of them to God's election, who best knows what is good for us: and sure this is such a piece of divinity as ex-

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tremely reproaches us Christians, who cannot match a heathen in his implicit faith to God. Nay, indeed, it is the vilest defamation upon God himself, that we, who pretend to know him more, should trust him less. So that we see our repinings do not terminate in their own proper guilt, but do in their consequences swell higher, and our discontents propagate themselves into blasphemy; for while we impatiently complain of our wants, we do tacitly tax God to want either that wisdom, power, or love, whereby he should supply us. And sure he must be very atheistical to whom this will not give a competent prejudice against this sin.

8. And this very consideration will equally prejudge the other branch of our discontents, I mean those which repine at the ills we suffer. And not only our privative, but our positive afflictions may by it have their bitterness taken off; for the same goodness and wisdom which denies those things we like, because they are hurtful for us, does upon the very same reason give us those distasteful things which he sees profitable. A wise physician does not only diet, but, if occasion be, purge his patient also; and surely there is not such a purifier, such a cleanser of the soul, as are afflictions, if we do not (like disorderly patients) frustrate their efficacy by the irregular management of ourselves under them.



CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE ADVANTAGE OF AFFLICTIONS.



T were the work of a volume to give an exact and minute account of the benefit of afflictions. I shall only point at some of the more general and ob-

vious. And first, it is one of the most awakening calls to repentance; and to this end it is that God most usually designs it. We see the whole scene of it, Hos. v. 15: "I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face; in their affliction they will seek me early;" and in the very next verse we find this voice of God echoed forth by a penitential note, "Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up." Thus we find the brethren of Joseph, though there had a long interval passed betwixt their barbarous usage of him and his feigned rigour to them, yet when they saw themselves distressed by the one, then they began to recollect the

other, saying, "We are verily guilty concerning our brother" (Gen. xlii. 21). Prosperity is an intoxicating thing; and there are few brains strong enough to bear it; it lays us asleep, and amuses us with pleasant dreams; whilst in the mean time Satan rifles our treasures, and spoils us, by the deceitful charms of sin, of our innocency and real happiness. And can there be a more friendly office done for a man in this condition than to rouse him, and bring him to apprehend the designs that are laid against him? And this is the errand on which afflictions are sent: so that we have reason to look on them as our friends and confederates, that intend our rescue, and to take the alarm they give us, and diligently seek out those intestine enemies of which they warn us. And he that instead of this guarrels at their interposing, thinks them his "enemies because they tell him the truth" (Gal. iv. 16); does miserably pervert "the counsel of God against himself" (Luke vii. 30); and may at last verify his own sealousies, and by so provoking an ingratitude convert those into the wounds of an enemy, which were originally meant as the corrections of a father.

2. And as afflictions do thus in general admonish us of sins, so it pleases God most frequently so to model and frame them, that they bear the very image and impress of those particular guilts they are to chastise, and are the dark shadows that attend our gay delights or flagrant insolencies. The wise man observes, that the turning the Egyptian

waters into blood was a manifest reproof of that cruel commandment for the murdering of the Hebrew infants (Wisd. xii. 5). And surely we might in most, if not all our sufferings, see some such corresponding circumstances as may lead us to the immediate provoking cause of it. God, who does all things in number, weight, and measure, does in punishments also observe a symmetry and proportion, and adapts them not only to the heinousness, but even the very specific kind of our crimes. The only fixed immutable rule he has given for his vicegerents on earth to punish by, is that in the case of murder, which is we see grounded on this rule of proportion, "He that sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. ix. 6). And though he have now rescinded the inferior retaliations of the "eye for the eye, the tooth for the tooth" (Exod. xxi. 24)-probably for the hardness of our hearts, because he saw our revengeful natures would be too much pleased with it,---yet he has not precluded himself from acting by those measures; but we see he does very often signally make men feel the smart of those violences or injustice they have used to others. Of this, sacred story affords several examples (as Adonibezek, Judges i. 6; and Ahab, 1 Kings xxi. 19), and profane many more, and daily experience and observation most of all. And though this method of retaliation is not always so evident and apparent to the world, because men's sins are not always so, yet I believe if men would duly re-

collect, it would be for the most part discernible to their own consciences; and they would apparently see that their calamities did but trace the footsteps of their sins.

3. Now if we rightly weigh this, we cannot but think it a very advantageous circumstance. We are naturally blind, when we look inward; and if we have not some adventitious light to clear the object, will be very apt to overlook it: therefore, since the / end of all our afflictions is our repentance, it is a wise and gracious disposal, that they do thus point to us those particular sins of which we are to repent. The body of sin will not be destroyed in the whole entire bulk, but must be dismembered, pulled to pieces limb by limb. He that attacks it otherwise will be like Sertorius's soldier, who ineffectively tugged at the horse's tail to get it off at once. when he that pulled it hair by hair quickly did it. Therefore, as it is a great part of our spiritual wisdom to know in what especial parts the Samson-like strength of our corruptions lies, so it is a great instance of God's care of us, thus by his corrections to discipline and instruct us in it.

4. In all our afflictions, therefore, it is our concern nicely and critically to observe them. I mean, not to enhance our murmurs and complaints, but to learn by them what is God's peculiar controversy against us. This is, indeed, to "hear the rod, and who hath appointed it" (Micah vi. 9). Let him, therefore, that suffers in any of his concerns examine

whether he have not some corresponding guilt which answers to it, " as face answers face" (Prov. xxvii. 19). He that is impoverished in his estate, let him consider, first, how he acquired it; whether there were not something of fraud or injustice, which like a cancerous humour mixed in its very elements and constitution, and ate out its bowels: or whether some sacrilegious prize, some coal from the altar, have not fired his nest. Or, if nothing can be charged upon the acquest, let him consider how he has used it : whether he hath not made it. the fuel of his lusts in riots and excesses, or the object of his adoration in an inordinate value of it. In like manner, he who is afflicted in his body, and groans under the torment of some grievous disease, may very seasonably interrogate himself, whether it have not been contracted by his vice; whether " his bones be not" (in a more literal sense than Job meant it) " full of the sins of his youth" (Job xx. 11); and his surfeiting and drunkenness be not the cause "that his soul," as the Psalmist speaks, "abhors all manner of meat, and is ever hard at death's door" (Ps. cvii. 18); or, at least, whether the not employing his health and strength to those purposes for which it was given, is not the reason of its being withdrawn. He also that is invaded in his reputation, that lies under some great infamy, is to consider whether it be not deserved; whether some part, if not the whole guilt of which he is accused, stick not to him; or if he be clear in that particular

instance, whether some concealed sin of his would not, if it were known, incur as great scandal; for in that case he has in right forfeited his reputation, and God may make the seizure as well by an unjust as a just accusation. Or, if his heart accuse him not here, yet let him farther reflect, whether his vain-glorious pursuits of praise, and high conceits of himself, have not made this an apt and necessary humiliation for him. Or, lastly, let him recollect how he has behaved himself towards others in this kind; whether he hath had a just tenderness of his neighbour's fame, or hath not rather exposed and prostituted it. In these, and many other instances, such a particular scrutiny would, in all probability, discover the affinity and cognation between our guilts and our punishments; and by marking out the spring and fountain-head, direct us how to stop or divert the current. And he that would diligently employ himself in this inquisition. would find little leisure and less cause to condole his afflictions, but would divert all his complaints upon himself, "accept of the punishment of his iniquity, and thank the Lord for thus giving him warning" (Ps. xvi. 8).

5. A second benefit which God designs us in our afflictions, is the weaning us from the world, to disentangle us from its fetters and charms, and draw us to himself. We read in the story of the deluge, that so long as the earth was covered with waters the very raven was contented to take shelter in the ark; but when all was fair and dry, even the dove finally forsook it (Gen. viii. 12). And it is much so with us; the worst of men will commonly in distresses have recourse to God; the very heathen mariners in a storm could rebuke Jonah for not calling upon his God (Jon. i. 6); when yet the very best of us are apt to forget him amidst the blandishments and insinuations of prosperity. The kind aspects of the world are very enchanting, apt to inveigle and besot us; and therefore it is God's care over us to let us sometimes see her more averting countenance in her frowns and storms, that, as children frighted by some ugly appearance, we may run into the arms of our Father. Alas. were all things exactly fitted to our humours here, when should we think of a remove? and had not death some harbingers to prepare us for him, what a surprising guest would he be to us! It is storied of Antigonus, that seeing a soldier in his camp of so daring a courage that he always courted the most hazardous attempts, and observing him also of a very infirm sickly habit, he took a particular care of him, and by medicines and good attendance recovered him : which no sooner he had done but the man grew more cautious, and would no longer expose himself as formerly; and gave this reason for it, that now he was healthy his life was of some value to him, and not to be hazarded at the same rate as when it was only a burden. And should God cure all our complaints, render us perfectly at ease,

I fear too many of us would be of the soldier's mind,-think our lives too good to resign to him, much more to hazard for him, as our Christianity in many cases obliges us. The son of Sirach observes how "dreadful death is to a man that is at rest in his possessions, that hath abundance of all things, and hath nothing to vex him;" nay, he descends much lower, and puts in him "who is yet able to receive meat" (Ecclus. xli. 1). The truth is, we do so passionately dote upon the world, that, like besotted loyers, we can bear a great deal of illusage before we quit our pursuit. Any little slight favour atones us after multiplied affronts; and we must be disciplined by repeated disappointments ere we can withdraw our confidence. But how fatally secure should we be, if God should permit this siren¹ always to entertain us with her music, and should not, by some discordant grating notes, interrupt our raptures, and recall us to sober thoughts !

6. Indeed, it is one of the highest instances of God's love, and of his clemency also, thus to project our reducement. We were all in our baptism affianced to him with a particular abrenunciation of the world, so that we cannot without the greatest disloyalty cast ourselves into its embraces; and yet, when we have thus "broken the covenant of our God" (Prov. ii. 17), he does not pursue us with a

¹ Siren,—a goddess who enticed men by singing, and devoured them; any mischievous enticer. jealous rage, with the severity which an abused rivalled kindness would suggest; doth not give us a bill of divorce, and disclaim his relation; but contrives how he may reclaim and bring us back The transcendency of this lenity God to himself. excellently describes, by the prophet, in the case of Israel: "They say, If a man put away his wife, and she become another man's, shall he return unto her again? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return unto me, saith the Lord" (Jer. iii. 1): and this, though a great height of indulgence, is no more than he daily repeats to us. After we have basely adulterated with the world, converted our affections from God to it, he does not give us over, abandon us to our lewd course and consequent ruin, but still invites our return; and lest that may not serve, he does, with a great deal of holy artifice, essay to break that accursed league into which we are entered, pulls off the disguise in which the world courted us, and makes us see it as it is in itself,-a scene of "vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccles. i. 14).

7. And as he does this in general, so also with a particular application to those temporal satisfactions wherewith we were most transported. The things to which we are more indifferent do not so much endanger us; it is those upon which we have more vehemently set our hearts, which become our snares and awake his jealousy; and accordingly we frequently see that it is in those he chooses to cross

How often does it happen that those which 118. are enamoured of themselves, dote upon their own features, do meet with some disease or accident which blasts their beauty, withers that fair flower, and makes their winter overtake their spring! So in our friends and relations, it is usually seen we soonest lose those for whom we have the greatest, the most immoderate passion. If there be one fondling among our children, it is odds but that is taken away, or made as much the object of our grief and sorrow as ever it was of our joy and love. When God sees our hearts so excessively cleave to any transitory thing, he knows it is necessary to sever them; for whilst we have such clogs upon us, "our souls will cleave to the dust" (Ps. cxix. 1), will not be able to soar up to the higher region for which they are designed.

8. In a word, God so loves us, that he removes whatever he sees will obstruct that intimate union which he desires with us: and sure this is so obliging, that though he should bid us to our loss, though he could not recompense us for what he takes from ns, yet we must be very ill-natured, if we can be angry at so much kindness. But when to this is added, that all this is principally, nay, solely designed for our advantage; that God takes from us all these empty, delusory contentments, merely that he may instate us in solid and durable joys,—we betray as much ignorance of our interest as insensibleness of our obligation, if we repine that God makes us so much his care. It is true, indeed, the things to which we have so inordinately adhered do stick so close, that they cannot be pulled away without some pain; yet for our corporal security we can endure the sundering of parts that do not only cleave, but grow to us. He that has a gangrened member suffers it to be cut off to save his whole body, and does not revile, but thank and reward the surgeon; vet where our souls are concerned, and where the things have no native union with us, but are only cemented by our passions, we are impatient of the method, and think God deals very hardly with us not to let us perish with what we love. The sum of all is this, God, though he be abundantly condescending, yet he will never stoop so low as to share his interest in us with the world : if we will devote ourselves to it, it is not all our empty forms of service will satisfy him; if we cannot divorce our hearts from it, he will divorce himself eternally from us: and the case being thus, we are sure very ill advised if we do not contentedly resign ourselves to his methods, and cheerfully endure them, how sharp soever. The only expedient we have for our own ease, is to shorten the cure by giving our assistance, and not by strugglings to render it more difficult and painful. Let us entirely surrender our wills to him; and when we have done that, we may without much pain let him take any thing else. But the more difficult we find it to be disentangled from the world, the greater should our caution be

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against all future engagements to it. If our escape hath been, as the apostle says, "so as by fire" (Jude 23), with much smart and hazard, let us at least have so much wit as the common proverb allows children, and not again expose ourselves; let us never glue our hearts to any external thing, but let all the concerns of the world hang loose about us: by that means we shall be able to put them off insensibly, whenever God calls for them; or perhaps we shall prevent his calling for them at all, it being for the most part our too close adhesion to them which prompts him to it.

9. A third advantage of afflictions is, that it is a mark and signature of our adoption, a witness of our legitimation. "What son is he," saith the apostle, "whom the father chastiseth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons" (Heb. xii. 7, 8). Jacob clad his darling Joseph in a particoloured coat; and God's favourites do here wear a livery, interwoven with a mixture of dark and gloomy colours; their "long white robes" are laid up for them against they come to the " marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. xix. 7). Indeed, we much mistake the design of Christianity, if we think it calls us to a condition of ease and security. It might suit well enough with the votaries of the golden calf to "sit down to eat and drink, and rise up to play" (Exod. xxxii. 6); but the disciples of the crucified

Saviour are trained to another discipline; our profession enters us into a state of warfare ; and accordingly our very baptismal engagement runs all in military terms, and we are not only servants of Christ's family, but soldiers of his camp. Now we know in a war men must not expect to pass their time in ease and softness, but, besides all the dangers and difficulties of the combat, have many other hardships to endure --- hunger and thirst, heat and cold, hard lodgings and weary marches; and he that is too nice for those will not long stick to his colours. And it is the same in our spiritual warfare. ---- many pressures and sufferings are annexed to it; and our passive valour is no less tried than our active. In respect of this it is, that our Saviour admonishes his proselvtes to compute first the difficulties incident to their profession: and that he may not ensnare us by proposing too easy terms, he bids us reckon upon the worst, and tells us, that he "that forsakes not all that he hath shall not be his disciple" (Luke xiv. 26); " and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv. 22). Indeed, it were very absurd for us to expect easier conditions, when these are the same to which our Leader has submitted. The "Captain of our salvation was perfected by sufferings" (Heb. ii. 10); " and if it behoved Christ to suffer before he entered into his glory" (Luke xxiv. 46), it were insolent madness

for us to look to be carried thither upon our beds of ivory, or from the noise of our harps and viols be immediately rapt into the choir of angels.

10. This has been so much considered by pious men, that they have looked upon their secular prosperities with fear and jealousy; and many have solemnly petitioned for crosses, as thinking them the necessary attestation of their sonship, and means of assimilation to their elder Brother. Why, then. should that which was so desirable to them appear so formidable to us? or why should we so vehemently deprecate what they so earnestly invited? If we indeed think it a privilege to be the sons of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, why do we grudge The Roman captain tells St. at the condition? Paul, that he obtained the immunities of a Roman " with a great sum" (Acts xxii. 28); and shall we expect so much a nobler and more advantageous adoption perfectly gratis,-look that God should change his whole economy for our ease-give us an eternal inheritance, discharged of those temporal incumbrances himself has annexed to it? This were sure as unjust a hope as it would be a vain When David had that ensnaring proposal one. made him, of being the king's son-in-law (1 Sam. xviii. 21), he set such a value upon the dignity, that he despised the difficulty of the condition: and sure we must have very low abject souls, if, when so infinitely a higher advancement is sincerely offered us, we can suffer any apprehension of hardship to

divert us. In a word, let us remember that of the apostle, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him" (2 Tim. ii. 12). And though our afflictions be in themselves not joyous, but grievous, yet when they are considered as the earnest of our future inheritance, they put on an another face, and may rather enamour than fright us.

11. A fourth advantage of afflictions is, that they excite our compassions towards others. There is nothing qualifies us so rightly to estimate the sufferings of others as the having ourselves felt them : without this our apprehensions of them are as dull and confused as a blind man's of colours, or a deaf man's of sounds. They "that stretch themselves upon their couches, that eat the lambs out of the flock and the calves out of the midst of the stall, that chant to the sound of the viol, drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments,-will not much be grieved with the afflictions of Joseph" (Amos vi. 4). Nay, so necessary is our experience towards our commiseration, that we see it was thought a requisite accomplishment of our High-priest (that highest example of unbounded compassion); and therefore saith the apostle, " It behoved him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High-priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people: for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. ii.

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17, 18). But if he, whose mere sense of our miseries brought him down to us, chose this expedient to advance his pity, how necessary is it to our petrified bowels! And since God has assigned our mercies to our brethren as the standard by which he will proportion his to us, it is more ours than their advantage to have them enlarged; so that when, by making us taste of their cup, acquainting us with the bitter relish of their sufferings, he prepares us to a Christian sympathy with them, it is but a remoter way of obliging and qualifying us for a more ample portion of his mercy. Nay, besides the profit, there is an honour accrues to us by it. Compassion is one of the best properties of our nature, and we unman ourselves when we put it off: nay, more, it is an attribute of the Divinity; and the more we advance in it, the closer approaches we make to him. And therefore we have all reason to bless him for that discipline by which he promotes in us so excellent, so necessary a grace.

12. A fifth benefit of affliction is, that it is an improvement of devotion, — sets us with more heartiness to our prayers. Whilst prosperity flows in upon us, we bathe ourselves in its streams, but are very apt to forget its Source ; so that God is fain to stop the current, leave us dry and parched, that our needs may make us do what our gratitude would not, — trace our blessings up to the original Spring, and both acknowledge and invoke him as the Author of all our good. This effect of afflictions is observed

by the prophet : " Lord, in trouble have they visited thee, they poured out a prayer when thy chastening was upon them" (Is. xxvi. 16). And I believe I may appeal to every man's experience, whether his prayers be not more frequent, and more hearty too. when he is under some distress. Then how importunate are we in our petitions! how profuse in our vows and promises ! saying with Israel, " Deliver us only, we pray thee, this day. And they put away the strange gods from among them, and served the Lord" (Judges x. 15). I confess it is no good indication of our temper, that we need thus to be put in the press ere we will yield any thing: yet since we are so disingenuous, it is a mercy in God to adapt his methods to us, to extort when we will not give; and if he can have no free-will offering, vet at least to exact his tribute. Nor does he design the effect of this should cease with the calamity that raised it, but expects our compelled addresses should bring us into the way of voluntary ones, and happily ensnare us into piety. And indeed herein are we worse than brutish, if it do not. We think it a barbarous rudeness to engage a man in our affairs, and, as soon as we have served our own turns, never take farther notice of him. Nay, indeed, the very beasts may lecture us in this piece of morality, many of them paying a signal gratitude where they have received benefits: and shall we not come up at least to their pitch? Shall not the endearment of our deliverance bring our Deliverer into some repute

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and consideration with us, and make us desire to keep up an acquaintance and intercourse with him? Yet, if ingenuity work not with us, let interest at least prevail; and the remembrance how soon we may need him again, admonish us not to make ourselves strangers to him. God complains of Israel, "Wherefore say my people, We are lords; we will come no more at thee?" (Jer. ii. 31)-a very insolent folly, to renounce that dependence by which alone they subsisted; and no less will it be in any of us, if we stop our recourse to him because we have had advantage by it. We have no assurance that the same occasion shall not recur: but with what face can we then resume that intercourse which in the interval we despised? So that, if we have but any ordinary providence, we shall still so celebrate past rescues as to continue in a capacity of begging more; and then we cannot but also confess the benefit of those first calamities which inspired our devotion, and taught us to pray in earnest, and will be ashamed that our thanks should be uttered in a fainter accent than our petitions; or our daily spiritual concerns should be more coldly solicited than our temporal accidental ones.

13. Nor is it only our devotion that is thus improved by our distresses, but many other graces, our faith, our hope, our patience, our Christian sufferance and fortitude. It is no triumph of faith to trust God for those good things which he gives us in hand—this is rather to walk by sense than faith; but to rely on him in the greatest destitution, " and against hope to believe in hope," this is the faith of a true child of Abraham, and will be " imputed" to us (as it was to him) " for righteousness" (Rom. iv. 22). So also our patience owes all its opportunities of exercise to our afflictions, and consequently owes also a great part of its being to them; for we know desuctude will lose habits. What imaginable use is there of patience where there is nothing to suffer? In our prosperous state we may indeed employ our temperance, our humility, our caution ; but patience seems then a useless virtue. nay indeed, for aught we know, may be counterfeit. till adversity bring it to the test. And yet this is the most glorious accomplishment of a Christian, that which most eminently conforms him to the image of his Saviour, whose whole life was a perpetual exercise of this grace; and therefore we love our ease too well, if we are unwilling to buy this pearl at any price.

14. Lastly, our thankfulness is (at least ought to be) increased by our distresses. It is very natural for us to reflect with value and esteem upon those blessings we have lost, and we too often de it to aggravate our discontent; but sure the more rational use of it is to raise our thankfulness for the time wherein we enjoyed them. Nay, not only our former enjoyments, but even our present deprivations, deserve our gratitude, if we consider the happy advantages we may reap from them. If we

will perversely cast them away, that unworthy contempt pays no scores; for we still stand answerable in God's account for the good he designed, and we might have had by it; and we become liable to a new charge, for our ingratitude in thus " despising the chastisement of the Lord" (Heb. xii. 5).

15. And now, if all these benefits of afflictions (which are yet but imperfectly recited) may be thought worth considering, it cannot but reconcile us to the sharpest of God's methods, unless we will own ourselves such mere animals as to have no other apprehensions than what our bodily senses convey to us. For sure, he that has reason enough to understand that he has an immortal soul, cannot but assent that its interests should be served, though with the displacency of his flesh. Yet, even in regard of that, our murmurings are oft very unjust; for we do many times ignorantly prejudge God's design towards us even in temporals, who frequently makes a little transient uneasiness the passage to secular felicities. Moses, when he fled out of Egypt, probably little thought that he should return thither a "god unto Pharaoh" (Ex. iv. 16); and as little did Joseph, when he was brought thither a slave, that he was to be a ruler there; yet as distant as those states were, the divine Providence had so connected them, that the one depends upon the other. And certainly we may often observe the like over-ruling hand in our own distresses, that those events which we have entertained with the greatest regret have in the consequences been very beneficial to us.

16. To conclude: we have certainly, both from speculation and experience, abundant matter to calm all our disquiets, to satisfy our distrusts, and to fix in us an entire resignation to God's disposals, who has designs which we cannot penetrate, but none which we need fear, unless we ourselves pervert them. We have our Saviour's word for it, that "he will not give us a stone when we ask bread, nor a scorpion when we ask a fish" (Matt. vii. 9). Nay, his love secures us yet farther from the errors of our own wild choice, and does not give us those stones and scorpions which we importune for. Let us, then, leave our concerns to Him who best knows them, and make it our sole care to entertain his dispensations with as much submission and duty, as he dispenses them with love and wisdom. And if we can but do so, we may dare all the power of earth, and hell too, to make us miserable; for be our afflictions what they can, we are sure they are but what we, in some respect or other, need; be they privative or positive, the want of what we wish, or the suffering of what we wish not, they are the disposals of Him who cannot err; and we shall finally have cause to say with the psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Ps. cxix. 71).

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CHAPTER IX.

OF OUR MISFORTUNES COMPARED WITH OTHER MEN'S.

BE come now to impress an equally just and useful consideration,-the comparing our misfortunes with those of other men; and he that does that will certainly see so little cause to think himself singular, that he will not find himself superlative in calamity; for there is no man living that can with reason affirm himself to be the very unhappiest man, there being innumerable distresses of others which he knows not of, and consequently. cannot bring them in balance with his own. A multitude of men there are whose persons he knows not, and even of those he does, he may be much a stranger to their distresses; many sorrows may lie at the heart of him who carries a smiling face, and many a man has been an object of envy to those who look but on the surface of his state, who yet, to those who know his private griefs, appears more worthy of compassion. And sure this confused uncertain estimate of other men's afflictions may

divert us from all loud outcries of our own. Solon, seeing a friend much oppressed with grief, carried him up to a tower that overlooked the cityof Athens; and shewing him all the buildings, said to him, "Consider how many sorrows have, do, and shall in future ages inhabit under all those roofs. and do not vex thyself with those inconveniences which are common to mortality, as if they were only yours." And sure it was good advice; for suffering is almost as inseparable an adjunct of our nature as dying is. Yet we do not see men very apt to embitter their whole lives by the foresight that they must die; but seeing it a thing as universal as inevitable, they are more forward to take up the epicure's resolution, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die" (1 Cor. xv. 32). And why should we not look upon afflictions also as the common lot of humanity; and as we take the advantages, so be content to bear the encumbrances of that state?

2. But besides that implicit allowance that is thus to be made for the unknown calamities of others, if we survey but those that lie open and visible to us, the most of us shall find enough to discountenance our complaints. Who is there that, when he has most studiously recollected his miseries, may not find some or other that apparently equals, if not exceeds, him? He that stomachs his own, being contomned and slighted, may see another persecuted and oppressed; he that groans under

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some sharp pain, may see another afflicted with sharper; and even he that has the most acute torments in his body, may see another more sadly cruciated by the agonies of his mind. So that if we would but look about us, we should see so many foreign occasions of our pity, that we should be ashamed to confine it wholly to ourselves.

3. It will perhaps be said, that this cannot be universally true, for that there must in comparative degrees be some lowest state of misery. I grant it: but still that state consists not in such an indivisible point, that any one person can have the enclosure: or if it do, it will be so hard for any to discern who that one person is, that I need desire no fairer a composition, than to have every man suspend his repinings till he can evince his title. But, alas, there are but few that can make any approaches to. such a pretence; for though, if we advert to men's complaints, we should think all degrees of comparison were confounded, and every man were equally. the greatest sufferer, yet certainly, in the truth of things, it is nothing so; for (not to repeat what was before mentioned, that probably no man is miserable in any proportion to the utmost degree of possibility,) the remarkably unhappy are very far the less number. And how passionately soever men exaggerate their calamities, yet perhaps in their sober mood they will scarce change states with those whom they profess to think more happy than themselves. It was the saying of Socrates, that if there

were a common bank made of all men's troubles. most men would rather choose to take those they brought, than to venture upon a new dividend. And, indeed, he had reason for his supposition; for, considering how great a part of many men's afflictions are of their own making, fictitious and imaginary, they may justly fear lest they should exchange feathers for lead, their own empty shadows for the real and pressing calamities of others; and cannot but think it best to sit down with their own, which serve their declamations as well, and their ease much better. We oft see men, at a little misshaping of a garment, a scarce-discernible error in their cook, or the shortest interruption in their sports, in such transports of trouble, as if they were the most unfortunate men in the world; yet for all that, you shall hardly persuade them to change with him whose coarse clothing supersedes all care of the fashion, whose appetite was never disappointed for want of sauce, and whose perpetual toil makes him insensible what the defeat of sport signifies.

4. Nay, even where the exchange seems more equal, where the afflictions are on both sides solid and substantial, yet a prudent man would scarce venture upon the barter. It is no small advantage to know what we have to contest with, to have experimented the worst of its attacks, by which we become better able to guard ourselves; but a new evil comes with the force of a surprise, and finds us open and disarmed. It is, indeed, almost a miraculous power that custom has in reconciling us to things otherwise displeasing: all our senses are taught to remit of their aversion by familiarity with ungrateful objects; that ugly form which at first makes us start, by use divests its terror; and we reconcile ourselves to harsh sounds and ill relishes by long custom. And sure it has the very same effect upon our minds: the most fierce calamities do by acquaintance grow more tractable; so that he that exchanges an old one for a new does but bring a wild lion into his house instead of a tame; it may, for aught he knows, immediately tear him to pieces, but at least must cost him a great deal of pains to render it gentle and familiar; and certainly no wise man would wish to make such a bargain.

5. By all this it appears that, how extravagantly soever we aggravate our own calamities, and extenuate other men's, we dare not upon recollection stand to our own estimate; and what can be said more in prejudice of our discontent? It is a granted maxim, that every man must have afflictions: "Man that is born of a woman," says Job, "is of few days, and full of trouble" (Job xiv. 1); and we must reverse God's fundamental law, before we can hope for a total exemption. All that any man can aspire to, is to have but an equal share with others; and the generality of men have so—at least none can prove he has not so; and till he can, his murmurs will sure be very unjustifiable, especially when they have this convincing circumstance against them. that he dares not, upon sober thoughts, change his afflictions with most of his neighbours. He is an ill member of a community who, in public assessments, would shuffle off all payments; and he is no better who, in this common tax God has laid upon our nature, is not content to bear his share.

6. And truly, would we but consider that in all our sufferings nothing befalls us but what is common to our kind, nay, which is extremely exceeded by many within the verge of our own observation, ---we must be senselessly partial to be impatient. The apostle thought it a competent consolation for the first Christians that " there had no temptation befallen them but what was common to man" (1 Cor. x. 13); and we betray very extravagant opinions of ourselves if it be not so to us. Indeed, it were scarce possible for us to be so unsatisfied as the greatest part of us are, did we, in the comparing ourselves with others, proceed with any tolerable ingenuity.

7. But, alas, we are very fallacious and deceitful in the point; we do not compare the good of others with our good, nor their evil with our evil; but with an envious curiosity we amass together all the desirable circumstances of our neighbour's condition, and with as prying discontent we ransack all our grievances, and confront to them. This is so insincere a way of proceeding, as the most ordinary understanding can detect. If I should wager that my arm were longer than another man's, and for trial

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measure my arm with his finger, he must be stupidly silly that should award for me; and yet this were not a grosser cheat than that which we put upon ourselves in our comparisons with others. And it is a little strange to observe unto what various purposes we can apply this one thin piece of sophistry; for when we compare our neighbours and ourselves in point of morality, we do but reverse the fallacy, and presently make his vices as much exceed ours as our calamities did his in the other instance. They are indeed both great violences to reason and justice, yet the latter is sure the pleasanter kind of deceit. A man has some joy in thinking himself less wicked than his neighbour; but what imaginable comfort can he take in thinking himself more miserable? Certainly he that would submit to a cozenage had much better shift the scene, and think his sufferings less than they are, rather than more; for since opinion is the thing that usually sets an edge upon our calamities, it might be a profitable deceit that could steal that from us.

8. But we need not blindfold ourselves, if we would but use our eyes aright, and see things in their true shapes; and if we did thus, what a strange turn would there be in the common estimates of the world! How many of the gilded troubles of greatness, which men at a distance look on with so much admiration and desire, would then be as much contemned as now they are courted! A competency would then get the better of abundance; and the

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now-envied pomp of princes, when balanced with the cares and hazards annexed, would be so far from a bait, that men, like Saul (1 Sam. x. 22), would "hide themselves" from the preferment; and he that understood the weight would rather choose to wield a flail than a sceptre; yet so childishly are we besotted with the glittering appearance of things, that we conclude Felicity must needs dwell where there is a magnificent portico; and being possessed with this fancy, we overlook her in her own humble cottages, where she would more constantly reside, if she could but find us at home; but we are commonly engaged in a rambling pursuit of her where she is seldomest to be found, and in the interim miss of her at our own door.

9. Indeed, there is scarce a greater folly or unhappiness incident to man's nature than this fond admiration of other men's enjoyments, and contempt of our own. And whilst we have that humour, it will supplant not only our present, but all possibilities of our future content; for though we could draw to ourselves all those things for which we envy others, we should have no sooner made them our own than they will grow despicable and nauseous to us. This is a speculation which has been attested by innumerable experiments; there being nothing more frequent than to see men with impatient eagerness, nay, often with extreme hazards, pursue those acquests, which, when they have them, they are immediately sick of. There is scarce any man that may not give himself instances of this in his own particular; and yet so fatally stupid are we, that no defeats will discipline us, or take us off from these false estimates of other men's happinesses. And truly, while we state our comparisons so unequally. they are as mischievous as the common proverb speaks them odious; but if we would begin at the right end, and look with as much compassion on the adversities of our brethren as we do with envy on their prosperities, every man would find cause to sit down contentedly with his own burden, and confess that he bears but the proportionable share of his common nature,-unless, perhaps, it be where some extraordinary demerits of his own have added to the weight; and in that case he has more reason to admire his afflictions are so few than so many. And certainly every man knows so many more ills by himself than it is possible for him to do by another, that he that really sees himself exceed others in his sufferings will find cause enough to think he does in sins also.

10. But if we stretch the comparison beyond our contemporaries, and look back to the generations of old, we shall have yet farther cause to acknowledge God's great indulgence to us. Abraham, though the friend of God, was not exempted from severe trials. He was first made to wander from his country, and betake himself to a kind of vagrant life; was a long time suspended from the blessing of his desired offspring; and when at last

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his beloved Isaac was obtained, it caused a domestic jar, which he was fain to compose by the expulsion of Ishmael, though his son also. But what a contest may we think there was in his own bowels. when that rigorous task was imposed on him of sacrificing his Isaac; and though his faith gloriously triumphed over it, yet sure there could not be a greater pressure upon human nature. David, the man after God's own heart, is no less signal for his afflictions than for his piety. He was for a great while an exile from his country, and (which he most bewailed) from the sanctuary, by the persecutions of Saul; and after he was settled in that throne to which God's immediate assignation had entitled him, what a succession of calamities had he in his own family: the incestuous rape of his daughter; the retaliation of that by the unnatural murder of Amnon, and that seconded by another no less barbarous conspiracy of Absalom against himself; his expulsion from Jerusalem; the base revilings of Shimei; and, finally, the loss of that darling son in the act of his sin.---a cluster of afflictions, in comparison whereof the most of ours are but like the "gleanings," as the prophet speaks, "after the vintage is done." It were, indeed, endless to instance in all the several forefathers of our faith before Christ's incarnation. The apostle gives us a brief, but very comprehensive, compendium of their sufferings: "They had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprison-

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ments; they were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth" (Heb. xi. 36-38). And if we look on the primitive Christians, we shall see them perfectly the counterpart to them : their privileges consisted not in any immunities from calamities,-for their whole lives were scenes of sufferings. St. Paul gives us an account of his own: "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft: of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one; thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep, in journeyings often," &c. (2 Cor. xi. 23): and if his single hardships rose thus high, what may we think the whole sum of all his fellow-labourers' amounted to together, with that noble army of martyrs who sealed their faith with their blood, of whose sufferings ecclesiastic history gives us such astonishing relations.

11. And now, "being compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses," the apostle's inference is very irrefragable, "let us run with patience the race which is set before us" (Heb. xii. 1, 2). But yet it is more so, if we proceed on to that consideration he adjoins: "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set

before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (ver. 2). Indeed, if we contemplate him in the whole course of his life, we shall find him rightly styled by the prophet "a man of sorrows" (Is. liii. 3). And as if he had charged himself with all our griefs as well as our sins, there is scarce any human calamity which we may not find exemplified in him. Does any complain of the lowness and poverty of his condition? Alas, his whole life was a state of indigence: he was forced to be an inmate with the beasts; he lay in a stable at his birth; and after himself professes that he "had not where to lay his head" (Luke ix. 58). Is any oppressed with infamy and reproach? He may see his Saviour accused as a "glutton and a wine-bibber" (Luke vii. 34), "a blasphemer" (John x. 33), "a sorcerer" (Matt. xii. 24), "a perverter of the nation" (Luke xxiii. 2); yea, to such a sordid lowness had they sunk his repute, that a seditious thief and murderer was thought the more eligible person, "not this man, but Barabbas" (John xviii. 40); and, finally, all this scene of indignities closed with the spiteful pageantry of mockery acted by the soldiers (Matt. xxvii. 28), and the yet more barbarous insultings of priests and scribes (ver. 41). Is any man despised or deserted by his friends? He was contemned by his countrymen, thought frantic by his friends, betrayed by one of his disciples, abandoned by all, unless that one who followed him longest to renounce him the most shamefully by a

threefold abjuration; nay, what is infinitely more than this, he seemed deserted by God also, as is witnessed by that doleful exclamation, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. xxvii. 46.) Is any dissatisfied with the hardships or laboriousness of his life? Let him remember his Saviour's was not a life of delicacy or ease; he was never entered in those academies of luxury, where men are "gorgeously apparelled and live delicately" (Luke vii. 25); but he was brought up under the mean roof of a carpenter, and consequently subjected to all the lowness of such an education. His initiation to his prophetic office was with the miraculous severity of a forty days' fast; and in his discharge of it, we find him in perpetual labours, "going about doing good" (Acts x. 38); and that not in triumph, like a prince bestowing his largesses, but in weary peregrinations, never riding but once, and that only upon a borrowed beast, and to fulfil a prophecy (Matt. xxi. 4). Does any man groan under sharp and acute pains? Let him consider what his Redeemer endured ; how in his infancy, at his circumcision, he offered the firstfruits, as an earnest of that bloody vintage when "he trod the wine-press alone" (Is. lxiii. 3). Let him attend him through all the stages of his direful passion, and behold his arms pinioned with rough cords; his head smitten with a reed and torn with his crown of thorns · his back ploughed with those "long furrows" (Ps. cxxix. 3) the scourges had

made; his macerated feeble body oppressed with the weight of his cross, and at last racked and extended on it: his hands and feet, those nervous and consequently most sensible parts, transfixed with nails; his whole body fastened to that accursed tree, and exposed naked to the air in a cold season; his throat parched with thirst, and yet more afflicted with that vinegar and gall wherewith they pretended to relieve him; and, finally, his life expiring amidst the full sense of these accurate torments. Lastly, does any man labour under the bitterest of all sorrows, importunate temptations to, or a wounded spirit for, sin? Even here also he may find that he has a "High-priest who hath been touched with the sense of his infirmities" (Heb. iv. 15). He was violently assaulted with a succession of temptations (Matt. iv.), and we cannot doubt but Satan would on him employ the utmost of his skill. Nor was he less oppressed with the burden of sin (ours, I mean), though not his own. What may we think were his apprehensions in the garden, when he so earnestly deprecated that which was his whole errand in the world? What a dreadful pressure was that which wrung from him that bloody sweat, and cast him into that inexplicable agony, the horror whereof was beyond the comprehensions of any but his who felt it! And, finally, how amazing was the sense of Divine wrath, which extorted that stupendous complaint, that "strong cry" on the cross (Heb. v. 7), the sharp

accent whereof, if it do aright sound on our hearts, must certainly quite overwhelm our loudest groans! And now certainly I may say with Pilate, "*Ecce, homo*—behold, the man!" or, rather, with a more divine author, "Behold, if ever there were sorrows like unto his sorrow" (Lam. i. 12).

12. And sure it were but a reasonable inference. that which we find made by Christ himself, "if these things be done in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" (Luke xxiii. 31.) If an imputative guilt could nourish so scorching a flame, pull down so severe a wrath, what can we expect who are merely made up of combustible matter, whose proper personal sins cry for vengeance? Sure, were we to judge by human measures, we should reckon to have more than a double portion of our Saviour's sufferings entailed upon us; yet such is the efficacy of his, that they have commuted for ours, and have left us only such a share as may evidence our relation to our crucified Lord; such as may serve only for badges and cognisances to whom we retain. For, alas, let the most afflicted of us weigh our sorrows with his, how absurdly unequal will the comparison appear! And therefore, as the best expedient to baffle our mutinies, to shame us out of our repinings, let us often draw this uneven parallel, confront our petty uneasinesses with his unspeakable torments; and sure it is impossible but our admiration and gratitude must supplant our impatiences.

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13. This is, indeed, the method to which the apostle directs us, "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ve be weary and faint in your minds: ye have not yet resisted unto blood" (Heb. xii. 3, 4). Was he contradicted, and shall we expect to be humoured and complied with? Did he resist to blood, and shall we think those pressures intolerable which force only a few tears from us? This is such an unmanly niceness, as utterly makes us unfit to follow the Captain of our salvation. What a soldier is he like to make that will take no share of the hazards and hardships of his general? Honest Uriah would not take the lawful solaces of his own house, upon the consideration that his "lord Joab" (though but his fellow-subject) " lay encamped in the open fields" (2 Sam. xi. 11), yea, though he was sent by him from the camp. And shall we basely forsake ours in pursuit of our ease? He is of a degenerous spirit, whom the example of his superior will not animate. Plutarch tells us, that Cato, marching through the deserts, was so distressed for water, that a small quantity was brought to him in a helmet as a great prize; which he refusing, because he could not help his soldiers to the like, they were so transported with that generosity, that it extinguished the sense of their thirst, and they were ashamed to complain of what their leader voluntarily endured for their sakes. And surely we extremely discredit

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our institution, if we cannot equal their ingenuity, and follow ours with as great alacrity through all the difficulties he has traced before us and for us.

14. Nor let us think to excuse ourselves upon the impotency of our flesh, which wants the assistance which his Divinity gave him; for that plea is superseded by the fore-mentioned examples of the saints, men of like passions with us, who not only patiently but joyfully endured all tribulations; by which it appears it is not impossible to our nature, with those aids of grace which are common to us with them; for certainly the difference between them and us is not so much in the degrees of the aids, as in the diligence of employing them. Let us, therefore, as the apostle advises, "lift up the hands which hang down and the feeble knees" (Heb. xii. 12), and with a noble emulation follow those heroic patterns they have set us. And since we see that even those favourites of heaven have smarted so severely, let us never dream of an immunity; but whenever we find ourselves inclining to any such flattering hope, let every one of us upbraid ourselves in those terms the Jews did our Saviour, " Art thou greater than Abraham and the prophets? whom makest thou thyself?" (John viii. 53.) Nay, we may descend lower, and take in not only all the inferior saints of former times, but all those our contemporaries in sufferings, which are most within our view, and may ask the apostle's question, "What then, are we better than they ?" (Rom. iii. 9.) If

we think we are, it is certain we are so much worse by that insolence; and if we confess we are not, upon what score can we pretend to be better treated? To conclude: let us not pore only upon our peculiar evils, but attentively look about us, and consider what others endure; and since in frolics we can sport ourselves with many uneasinesses for companysake, let us not be more pusillanimous in our sober moods, but every man cheerfully take his turn in bearing the common burden of mortality, till we put off both it and its appendages together, "when this mortal shall put on immortality" (1 Cor. xv. 54).





CHAPTER X.

OF PARTICULAR AIDS FOR THE GAINING OF CONTENTMENT.



AVING now passed through all those considerations at first proposed, I may trust the considering reader to make his own collections; yet because im-

patience is the vice that has been all this while arraigned, I am to foresee, if possible, that those who have the greatest degree of that may be the least willing to attend the whole process; and therefore I think it may not be amiss for their ease to suit and reduce all into some short directions and rules for the acquiring contentment.

2. The first and most fundamental is, the mortifying our pride, which as it is the seminary of most sins, so especially this of repining. Men that are highly opinioned of themselves are commonly unsatisfiable; for how well soever they are treated, they still think it short of their merits. Princes have often experimented this in those who have done them signal services; but God finds it in those who have done him none; and we expect he shall dispense to us according to those false estimates we put upon ourselves. Therefore he that aspires to content must first take truer measures of himself, and consider that as he was nothing till God gave him a being, so all that he can produce from that being is God's by original right, and therefore can pretend to nothing of reward; so that whatever he receives is still upon the account of new bounty; and to complain that he has no more, is like the murmurs of an unthankful debtor, who would still increase those scores which he knows he can never pay.

3. In the second place, let every man consider how many blessings (notwithstanding his no claim to any) he daily enjoys, and whether those he so impatiently raves after be not much inferior to them. Nay, let him ask his own heart, whether he would quit all those he has for them he wants; and if he would not (as I suppose no man in his wits would, those wits being part of the barter), let him then judge how unreasonable his repinings are, when himself confesses he has the better part of worldly happiness, and never any man living had all.

4. In the third place, therefore, let him secure his duty of thankfulness for those good things he hath, and that will insensibly undermine his impatiences for the rest, it being impossible to be at once thankful and murmuring. To this purpose it were very well, if he would keep a solemn catalogue of all the bounties, protections, and deliverances he has received from God's hand, and every night examine what accessions that day has brought to

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the sum; and he that did this would undoubtedly find so many incitations to gratitude, that all those to discontent would be stifled in the crowd. And since acknowledgment of God's mercies is all the tribute he exacts for them, we must certainly look on that as an indispensable duty; and therefore he that finds that God shortens his hand, stops the efflux of his bounty towards him, should reflect on himself, whether he be not behind in that homage by which he holds, and have not by his unthankfulness "turned away good things from him" (Jer. v. 25). And if he find it so (as who, alas, is there that may not?), he cannot, sure, for shame, complain, but must in prudence reinforce his gratitude for what is left, as the best means to recover what he has lost.

5. But his murmurs will yet be more amazingly silenced, if, in the fourth place, he compares the good things he enjoys with the ill he has done. Certainly this is a most infallible cure for our impatiences, the holiest man living being able to accuse himself of such sins as would, according to all human measures of equity, forfeit all blessings, and pull down a greater weight of judgment than the most miserable groan under. Therefore, as before I advised to keep a catalogue of benefits received, so here it would be of use to draw up one of sins committed. And, doubtless, he that confronts the one with the other, cannot but be astonished to find them both so numerous, equally wondering at God's mercy in

continuing his blessings, in despite of all his provocations, and at his own baseness in continuing his provocations, in despite of all those blessings. Indeed, it is nothing but our affected ignorance of our own demerits that makes it possible for us to repine under the severest of God's dispensations. Would we but ransack our hearts, and see all the abominations that lie there, nay, would the most of us but recollect those barefaced crimes which even the world can witness against us, we should find more than enough to balance the heaviest of our pressures. When, therefore, by our impatient strugglings, we fret and gall ourselves under our burdens, let us interrogate our souls in the words of the prophet, "Why doth a living man complain,---a man for the punishment of his sin?" Let us not spend our breath in murmurs and outcries, which will only serve to provoke more stripes; but "let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord" (Lam. iii. 39, 40); diligently seek out that accursed thing which has caused our discomfiture (Jos. vi. 18), and by the removal of that, prepare the way for the access of mercy. But, alas, how preposterous a method do we take in our afflictions! We accuse every thing but what we ought, furiously fly at all the second causes of our calamity, nay, too often at the first, by impious disputes of Providence; and in the meantime, as Job says, "the root of the matter is found in us" (Job xix. 28). We shelter and protect in our bosoms

the real author of our miseries. The true way, then, to allay the sense of our sufferings, is to sharpen that of our sins. The prodigal thought the meanest condition in his father's family a preferment, "Make me one of thy hired servants" (Luke xv. 19). And if we have his penitence, we shall have his submission also, and calmly attend God's disposals of us.

6. As every man in his affliction is to look inward on his own heart, so also upward, and consider by whose Providence all events are ordered : "Is there any evil (i. e. of punishment) in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos iii. 6.) And what are we worms that we should dispute with him? Shall a man contend with his Maker? "Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth" (Isa. xlv. 9). And as his power is not to be controlled, so neither is his justice to be impeached : "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. xviii. 25.) And where we can neither resist nor appeal, what have we to do but humbly to submit? Nor are we only compelled to it by necessity, but induced and invited by interest, since his dispensations are directed not barely to assert his dominion, but to evidence his paternal care over us. He discerns our needs, and accordingly applies to us. The benignity of his nature permits him not to take delight in our distresses; "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men" (Lam. iii. 33); and therefore, whenever he administers to us a bitter cup, we may be sure the ingredients are medicinal, and such as our

infirmities require. He dares not trust our intemperate appetites with unmixed prosperities,-the lusciousness whereof, though it may please our palates, yet like St. John's book (Rev. x. 9), that honey in the mouth may prove gall in the bowels, -engender the most fatal diseases. Let us therefore, in our calamities, not consult " with flesh and blood" (Gal. i. 16), which, the more it is bemoaned, the more it complains,-but look to the hand that strikes, and assure ourselves, that the stripes are not more severe than he sees necessary in order to our good; and since they are so, they ought in reason to be our choices as well as his; and not only religion, but self-love will prompt us to say, with old Eli, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good" (1 Sam. iii. 18). But, alas, we do not understand what is our interest, because we do not rightly understand what we are ourselves. We consider ourselves merely in our animal being, our bodies and those sensitive faculties vested in them : and when we are invaded there, we think we are undone, though that breach be made only to relieve that diviner part within us, besieged and oppressed with the flesh about it (for so God knows it too often is); or if we do not consider it in that notion of an enemy, yet at the utmost estimate, the body is to the soul but as the garment to the body, a decent case or cover: now, what man (not stark frantic) would not rather have his clothes cut than his flesh? and then, by the rate of proportion, we

may well question our own sobriety, when we repine that our souls are secured at the cost of our bodies; and that is certainly the worst, the unkindest design that God has upon us; and our impatient resistances serve only to frustrate the kind, the medicinal part of afflictions, but will not at all rescue us from the severe. Our murmurings may ruin our souls, but will never avert any of our outward calamities.

7. A seventh help to contentment is, to have a right estimate of the world, and the common state of humanity; to consider the world but as a stage, and ourselves but as actors, and to resolve that it is very little material what part we play, so we do it well. A comedian may get as much applause by acting the slave as the conqueror, and he that acts the one to-day may to-morrow reverse the part, and personate the other. So great are the vicissitudes of the world, that there is no building any firm hopes upon it. All the certainty we have of it is, that in every condition it has its uneasinesses; so that when we court a change; we rather seek to vary than end our miseries. And certainly he that has well impressed upon his mind the vanity and vexation of the world, cannot be much surprised at any thing that befalls him in it. We expect no more of any thing but to do its kind; and we may as well be angry that we cannot bring the lions to our cribs, or fix the wind to a certain point, as that we cannot secure ourselves from dangers and disappointments

in this rough and mutable world. We are, therefore, to lay it as an infallible maxim, that in this vale of tears every man must meet with sorrows and disasters; and then sure we may take our peculiar with evenness of temper, as being but the natural consequent of our being men. And though possibly we may every one think himself to have a double portion, yet that is usually from the deceitful comparison we make of ourselves with others. We take the magnifying glasses of discontent and envy when we view our own miseries and others' felicities, but look on our enjoyments and their sufferings through the contracting optics of ingratitude and incompassion; and whilst we do thus, it is impossible but we must foment our own dissatisfactions. He that will compare to good purpose, must do it honestly and sincerely, and view his neighbour's calamities with the same attention he does his own, and his own comforts with the same he does his neighbour's; and then many of the great seeming inequalities would come pretty near a level.

8. But even where they do not, it, in the eighth place, deserves, however, to be considered, how illnatured a thing it is for any man to think himself more miserable because another is happy; and yet this is the very thing by which alone many men have made themselves wretched; for many have created wants, merely from the envious contemplation of other men's abundance. And, indeed, there

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is nothing more disingenuous, or (to go higher) more diabolical. Lucifer was happy enough in his original state; yet could not think himself so. because he was "not like the Most High" (Is. xiv. 14). And when by that insolent ambition he had forfeited bliss, it has ever since been an aggravation of his torment, that mankind is assumed to a capacity of it; and accordingly he makes it the design of his envious industry to defeat him. Now, how perfectly are the two first parts of this copy transcribed by those who first cannot be satisfied with any inferior degree of prosperity, and then whet their impatiences with other men's enjoyments of what they cannot attain? And it is much to be doubted, that they who go thus far may complete the parallel, and endeavour, when they have opportunity, to undermine that happiness they envy; therefore, since Satan is so apt to impress his whole image where he has drawn any of his lineaments, it concerns us warily to guard ourselves, and by a Christian sympathy with our brethren, "rejoice with them that do rejoice" (Rom. xii. 15); make the comfort of others an allay, not an improvement of our own miseries. Charity has a strange magnetic power, and attracts the concerns of our brethren to us; and he that has that in his breast can never want refreshment whilst any about him are happy; for by adopting their interest, he shares in their joys. Jethro, though an alien, "rejoiced for all the good God had done to Israel"

(Exod. xviii. 9); and why should not we have as sensible a concurrence with our fellow-Christians? And he that has so will still find something to balance his own sufferings.

9. Let him that aspires to contentment set bounds to his desire. It is our common fault in this affair, we usually begin at the wrong end; we "enlarge our desires as hell, and cannot be satisfied" (Hab. ii. 5), and then think God uses us ill, if he do not fill our insatiable appetites; whereas, if we would confine our expectations to those things which we need, or he has promised, there are few of us who would not find them abundantly answered. Alas, how few things are there which our nature (if not stimulated by fancy and luxury) requires! And how rare is it to find them who want those; nay, who have not many additionals for delight and pleasure! And yet God's promise under the Gospel extends only to those necessaries; for where Christ assures his disciples that "these things shall be added unto them" (Matt. vi. 33), the context apparently restrains "these things" to meat, and drink, and clothing. Therefore, "take no thought for your life, what you shall eat, or what you shall drink, nor yet for the body, what you shall put on" (v. 25). Now what pretence have we to claim more than our charter gives us? God never articled with the ambitious to give him honours, with the covetous to fill his bags, or with the voluptuous to feed his luxuries. Let us,

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therefore, if we expect to be satisfied, modestly confine our desires within the limits he has set us, and then every accession which he superadds will appear (what it is) a largess and bounty. But whilst our appetites are boundless, and rather stretched than filled with our acquests, what possibility is there of their satisfaction? and when we importune God for it, we do but assign him such a task the poets made a representation of their hell, the filling a sieve with water, or the rolling a stone up a precipice.

10. A great expedient for contentment is to confine our thoughts to the present, and not to let them loose to future events. Would we but do this, we might shake off a great part of our burden; for we often heap fantastic loads upon ourselves by anxious presages of things which perhaps will never happen, and yet sink more under them than under the real weight that is actual upon us; and this is certainly one of the greatest follies imaginable; for either the evil will come, or it will not: if it will, it is, sure, no such desirable guest that we should go out to meet it,-we shall feel it time enough when it falls on us, we need not project to anticipate our sense of it; but if it will not, what extreme madness is it for a man to torment himself with that which will never be, to create engines of tortures, and by such aerial afflictions make himself as miserable as the most real ones could do! And truly this is all that we usually

get by our foresights. Prevision is one of God's attributes; and he mocks at all our pretences to it, by a frequent defeating of all our forecasts. He does it often in our hopes; some little cross circumstance many times demolishes those goodly machines we raise to ourselves: and he does it no less in our fears; those ills we solemnly expected often balk us, and others from an unexpected coast suddenly invade us. And since we are so blind, so short-sighted, let us never take upon us to be scouts, to discover danger at a distance (for it is manifold odds we shall only bring home false alarms), but let us rest ourselves upon that most admirable aphorism of our blessed Lord, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof" (Matt. vi. 34); apply ourselves with Christian courage to bear the present, and leave God either to augment or diminish, as he sees fit, for the future. Or if we will needs be looking forward, let it be in obedience, not contradiction to our duty : let us entertain ourselves with those futurities which we are sure are not chimeras, death and judgment, heaven and hell. The nearer we draw these things to our view, the more insensible will all intermedial objects be; they will deceive our sense of present, and much more forestall the apprehension of future evils; for it is our neglect of things eternal that leaves us thus at leisure for the transitory.

11. In the last place, let us in all our distresses supersede our anxieties and solicitudes by that most CH. X.] AIDS FOR CONTENTMENT.

effectual remedy the apostle prescribes, "Is any man afflicted, let him pray" (James v. 13). And this sure is a most rational prescription; for, alas, what else can we do towards the redress of our griefs; we who are so impotent, that we have not power over the most despicable excrescence of our own body, cannot make "one hair white cr black" (Matt. v. 36),-what can we do towards the newmoulding our condition, or modelling things without us? Our solicitudes serve only to bind our burdens faster upon us; but this expedient of prayer will certainly relieve us. "Call upon me," says God, "in the time of trouble, and I will hear thee, and thou shalt praise me" (Ps. l. 15). Whenever, therefore, we are sinking in the floods of affliction, let us thus support ourselves by representing our wants unto our gracious Lord, cry unto him as St. Peter did, and he will take us by the hand, and, be the winds never so boisterous or contrary, preserve us from sinking (Matt. xiv. 30): the waves or billows of this troublesome world will serve but to toss us closer into his arms, who can with a word appease the roughest tempest, or rescue from it. O, let us not, then, be so unkind to ourselves as to neglect this infallible means of our deliverance, but, with the psalmist, take our refuge under the "shadow of the divine wings till the calamity be over-passed" (Ps. lvii. 1). And as this is a sure expedient in all our real important afflictions, so is it a good test by which to try what are so. We

are often peevish and disquieted at trifles, nay, we take up the quarrels of our lusts and vices, and are discontented when they want their wished supplies. Now, in either of these cases, no man that at all considers who he prays to, will dare to insert these in his prayers, it being a contempt of God to invoke him in things so slight as the one, or impious as the other: it will, therefore, be good for every man, when he goes to address for relief, to consider which of his pressures they are that are worthy of that solemn deprecation; and when he has singled those out, let him reflect, and he will find he has in that prejudged all his other discontents as frivolous or wicked; and then sure he cannot think fit to harbour them, but must for shame dismiss them, since they are such as he dares not avow to Him from whom alone he can expect relief. God always pities our real miseries, but our imaginary ones dare not demand it. Let us not, then, create such diseases to ourselves as we cannot declare to our physician; and when those are precluded, for all the rest St. Paul's recipe is a catholicon,9 "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayers and supplications, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. iv. 6).

⁹ Catholicon, — an universal medicine.



CHAPTER XI.

OF BESIGNATION.



ND now, amidst such variety of receipts, it will be hard to instance any one sort of calamity which can escape their efficacy, if they be but duly ap-But, indeed, we have generally a compenplied. dious way of frustrating all remedies by never making use of them; like fantastic patients, we are well enough content to have our disease discoursed and medicines prescribed, but when the physic comes, have still some pretence or other to protract the taking it. But I shall beseech the reader to consider, that counsels are no charms, to work without any co-operation of the concerned person; they must be adverted to, they must be pondered and considered, and finally they must be practised, or else the utmost good they can do us, is to give us a few hours' divertisement in the reading; but they do us a mischief that infinitely outweighs it, for they improve our guilts by the ineffective tender they make of rescuing us from

them, and leave us accountable, not only for the original crimes, but for our obstinate adhesion to them in spite of admonition.

2. I say this, because it is a little too notorious. that many take up books only as they do cards or dice,-as an instrument of diversion.. It is a good entertainment of their curiosity to see what can be said upon any subject; and be it well or ill handled. they can please themselves equally with the ingenuity or ridiculousness of the composure; and when they have done this, they have done all they designed. This, indeed, may be tolerable in romances and play-books, but sure it ill befits divinity. And yet I fear it oftenest happens there; for in the former some do project for some trivial improvements, as the embellishing of their style, the inspiriting of their fancies; and some men would scarce be able to drive their peddling trade of wit, did they not thus sweep the stage; but, alas, how many books of piety are read, of which one cannot discern the least tincture in men's conversations ! which sure does in a great measure proceed from the want of a determinate design in their reading, men's practice being not apt to be less rovers than their speculation. He that takes a practical subject in hand must do it with a design to conform his practice to what he shall there be convinced to be his duty; and he that comes not with this probity of mind is not like to be much benefited by his reading.

3. But one would think this should be an un-

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necessary caution at this time; for since the intent of this tract is only to shew men the way to contentment, it is to be supposed the readers will be as much in earnest as the writer can be, it being every man's proper and most important interest, the instating him in the highest and most supreme felicity that this world can admit: yet for all this fair probability, I doubt many will, in this instance, have the same indifference they have in their other spiritual concerns.

4. It is true, indeed, that a querulous repining humour is one of the most pernicious, the most ugly habits incident to mankind; but yet as deformed people are oft the most in love with themselves, so this crooked piece of our temper is of all others the most indulgent to itself. Melancholy is the most stubborn and untractable of all humours ; and discontent, being the offspring of that, partakes of that inflexibility; and accordingly we see how impregnable it often is against all assaults of reason and religion too. Jonah, in a sullen mood, would justify his discontent even to God himself, and in spite of that calm reproof, "dost thou well to be angry?" (Jon. iv. 9) aver "he did well to be angry even to death." And do we not frequently see men, upon an impatience of some disappointment, grow angry even at their comforts? Their friends, their children, their meat, their drink, every thing grows nauseous to them, and, in a frantic discontent, they

often fling away those things which they most value. Besides, this peevish impatience is of so aerial a diet, that it is scarce possible to starve it. It will nourish itself with phantasms and chimeras, suborn a thousand surmises and imaginary distresses to abet its pretences; and though every one of us can remonstrate to one another the unreasonableness of this discontent, yet scarce any of us will draw the argument home, or suffer ourselves to be convinced by what we urge as irrefragable to others. Nay, farther, this humour is impatient of any diversion. loves to converse only with itself. In bodily pains, men that despair of cure are yet glad of allays and mitigations, and strive by all arts to divert and deceive the sense of their anguish; but in this disease of the mind, men cherish and improve their torment, roll and chew the bitter pill in their mouths, that they may be sure to have its utmost flavour; and by devoting all their thoughts to the subject of their grief, keep up an uninterrupted sense of it,-as if they had the same tyranny for themselves which Caligula had for others, and loved to feel themselves die. Indeed, there is not a more absurd contradiction in the world, than to hear men cry out of the weight, the intolerableness of their burden, and vet grasp it as fast as if their life were bound up in it; will not deposit it, no not for the smallest breathing-time. A strange fascination sure, and vet so frequent, that it ought to be the fundamental

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care of him that would cure men of their discontents, to bring them to a hearty willingness of being cured.

5. It may be this will look like paradox, and every man will be apt to say he wishes nothing more in earnest than to be cured of his present dis-He that is poor would be cured by wealth, content. he that is low and obscure by honour and greatness; but so an hydropic (dropsical) person may say he desires to have his thirst cured by a perpetual supply of drink; yet all sober people know that that is the way only to increase it; but let the whole habit of the body be rectified, and then the thirst will cease of itself. And certainly it is the very same in the present case; no outward accessions will ever satisfy our cravings; our appetites must be tamed and reduced, and then they will never be able to raise tumults, or put us into mutiny and discontent; and he, and none but he, that submits to this method, can truly be said to desire a cure.

6. But he that thus attests the reality of his desires, and seeks contentment in its proper sphere, may surely arrive to some considerable degrees of it. We find in all ages men that only by the direction of natural light have calmed their disquiets, and reasoned themselves into contentment even under great and sensible pressures; men who, amidst the acutest torments, have still preserved a screnity of mind, and have frustrated contempts and reproaches by disregarding them. And sure we give a very ill account of our Christianity, if we cannot do as much with it as they did without it.

7. I do not here propose such a stoical insensibility as makes no distinction of events, which, though it has been vainly pretended to by many, yet sure was never attained by any upon the strength of reasoning. Some natural dulness or casual stupefaction must concur to that; and perhaps by doing so, has had the luck to be canonised for virtue. I mean only such a superiority of mind as raises us above our sufferings, though it exempt us not from the sense of them. We cannot purpose to ourselves a higher pattern in any virtue than our blessed Lord : vet we see he not only felt that load under which he lay, but had the most pungent and quick sense of it, such as prompted those earnest deprecations: "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass;" yet all those displacences of his flesh were surmounted by the resignation of his spirit, " nevertheless, not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Luke xxii. 42). And certainly he that, in imitation of this pattern, does, in spite of all the reluctances of his sense, thus entirely submit his will, however he may be sad, yet he is not impatient, nor is he like to be sad long; for to him that is thus resigned " light will spring up" (Ps. xcvii. 11); some good angel will be sent, like that to our Saviour, to relieve his disconsolation;

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God will send either some outward allays, or give such interior comforts and supports, as shall counterpoise those afflictions he takes not off.

8. Indeed, the grand design of God in correcting us is (the same with that of a prudent parent towards his child), to break our wills. That stubborn faculty will scarce bend with easy touches, and therefore does require some force; and when by that rougher handling he has brought it to a pliantness, the work is done. It is therefore our interest to co-operate with this design, to assist as much as we are able towards the subjugating this unruly part of ourselves. This is that Sheba (2 Sam. xx. 21), the surrendering of whom is God's expectation in all the close sieges he lays to us. Let us then be so wise as, by an early resigning it, to divert his farther hostilities, and buy our peace with him.

9. And truly this is the way not only to gain peace with him, but ourselves too: it is the usurpation of our will over our reason which breeds all the confusion and tumults within our own breasts, and there is no possibility of curbing its insolence but by putting it into safe custody, committing it to Him who (as our Church teaches us) alone can order the unruly wills of sinful men. Indeed, nothing but experience can fully inform us of the serenity and calm of that soul who has resigned his will to God. All care of choosing for himself is happily superseded; he is tempted to no anxious forecasts for future events, for he knows nothing

THE ART OF CONTENTMENT.

can happen in contradiction of that supreme will in which he hath sanctuary, which will certainly choose for him with that tenderness and regard that a faithful guardian would for his pupil, an indulgent father for his child that casts itself into his arms. Certainly there is not in the world such a holy sort of artifice, so divine a charm to tie our God to us, as this of resigning ourselves to him. We find the Gibeonites, by yielding themselves vassals to the Israelites, had their whole army at their beck to rescue them in their danger (Jos. x. 6); and can we think God is less considerate of his homagers and dependents? No, certainly; his honour as well as his compassion is concerned in the relief of those who have surrendered themselves to him.

10. Farther yet: when, by resignation, we have united our wills to God, we have quite changed the scene; and we who, when our wills stood single, were liable to perpetual defeats, in this blessed combination can never be crossed. When our will is twisted and involved with God's. the same Omnipotence which backs his will does also attend ours. God's will, we are sure, admits of no control, can never be resisted; and we have the same security for ours, so long as it concurs with it. By this means all calamities are unstinged; and even those things which are most repugnant to our sensitive natures are yet very agreeable to our spirits, when we consider they are implicitly our own choice, since they are certainly His whom we have deputed to elect for

us. Indeed, there can be no face of adversity so averting and formidable, which, set in this light, will not look amiable. We see daily how many uneasinesses and prejudices men will contentedly suffer in pursuit of their wills; and if we have really espoused God's, made his will ours, we shall with as great nay, far greater — alacrity embrace its distributions, how uneasy soever to our sense; our souls will more acquiesce in the accomplishment of the Divine will, than our flesh can reluct to oppose any severe effects of it.

11. Here, then, is that footing of firm ground, on which whosoever can stand may indeed do that which Archimedes boasted — move the whole world.¹ He may, as to himself, subvert the whole course of sublunary things, unvenom all those calamities which are to others the gall of asps, and, in a farther sense, verify that evangelical prophecy of "beating swords into ploughshares, and spears into pruning-hooks" (Is. ii. 4): the most hostile weapons, the most adverse events, shall be by him converted into instruments of fertility, shall only advance his spiritual growth.

12. And now, who can choose but confess this a much more eligible state, than to be always harassed with solicitudes and cares, perpetually either fearing future defeats, or bewailing the past? And

¹ An allusion to the well-known saying of that great mathematician: "Give me a spot to stand upon, and I will move the world." then, what can we call it less than madness or enchantment for men to act so contrary to their own dictates, yea, to their very sense and experience, to see and acknowledge the inexplicable felicity of a resigned will, and yet perversely to hold out theirs, though they can get nothing by it but the sullen pleasure of opposing God and tormenting themselves? Let us, therefore, if not for our duty or ease, yet at least for our reputation, the asserting ourselves men of sobriety and common sense, do that which upon all these interests we are obliged; let us but give up our wills, and with them we shall certainly divest ourselves of all our fruitless anxieties. and cast our burdens upon Him who invites us to do so. He who hears all our sins will hear all our sorrows, our griefs too. If we will but be content to deposit them, he will relieve us from all those oppressing weights which make "our souls cleave to the dust" (Ps. cxix. 25), and will in exchange give us only his "light, his pleasant burden" (Matt. xi. 30). In a word, there will be no care left for us but that of keeping ourselves in a capacity of his; let us but secure our love to him, and we are ascertained that " all things shall work together for our good" (Rom. viii. 28).

To conclude, resignation and contentment are virtues not only of a near cognation and resemblance, but they are linked as the cause and the effect. Let us but make sure of resignation, and content will flow into us without our farther industry; as, on

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the contrary, whilst our wills are at defiance with God's, we shall always find things at as great defiance with ours. All our subtilities or industries will never mould them to our satisfactions till we have moulded ourselves into that pliant temper that we can cordially say, "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good" (1 Sam. iii. 18).





THE CLOSE.

HIS short institution of the Art of Contentment cannot more naturally or more desirably draw to a conclusion than in the resort we have given it, in the bosom of Divine Providence. The Roman conquerors, as the last pitch of all their triumphs, went to the Capitol and laid their garlands in the lap of Jupiter; but the Christian has an easier way to triumph, to put his crown of thorns (for that is the trophy of his victories) within the arms of his gracious God; there lodge his fears, his wants, his sorrows, and himself too, as in the best repository.

2. The Gospel-command of "not caring for the morrow" (Matt. vi. 34), and being "careful for nothing" (Phil. iv. 6), nakedly proposed, might seem the abandoning of us to all the calamities of life; but when we are directed to "cast all our care" upon a gracious and all-powerful Parent, and are assured that "he cares for us" (1 Pet. v. 7), that "though a woman may forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of

THE CLOSE.

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her womb, yet will he not forget" his children (Isaiah xlix. 15), this will abundantly supersede all cavil and objection. Whilst worldly men trust in an arm of flesh, lay up "treasure on earth," a prey for "rust and moth" (Matt. vi. 19), and "a torment" to themselves (James v. 3), the Christian has omnipotence for his support, and a "treasure in heaven, where no thief approaches, nor moth corrupts" (Matt. vi. 20). Whilst bold inquirers call in question God's secret will, oblige him to their subor supra-lapsarian schemes, their absolute or conditional decrees, their grace foreseen or predetermined; the pious man, with awful acquiescence, submits to that which is revealed, resolves for ever to obey, but never to dispute; as knowing that the beloved disciple leaned on his Master's bosom, but it is the thief's and traitor's part to go about to rifle it.

3. It is surely a modest demand in the behalf of God Almighty, that we should allow him as much privilege in his world, as every peasant claims in his cottage — to be master there, and dispose of his household as he thinks best; to "say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to his servant, Do this, and he doeth it" (Matt. viii. 9). And if he would afford him this liberty, there would be an immediate end put to all clamour and complaint.

4. We make it our daily prayer, that the "will" of God "may be done in earth as it is in heaven," with a ready, swift, and uninterrupted constancy. As it is giant-like rebellion to set up our will against his, so is it mad perverseness to set it up against our own; be displeased that our requests are granted, and repine that his, and therewith our will is done. It were indeed not only good manners but good policy to observe the direction of the heathen, and follow God, not prejudge his determination by ours; but in a modest suspension of our thoughts, "hearken what the Lord God will say concerning us, for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints, that they turn not again" (Ps. lxxxv. 8).

5. Or, however, upon surprise, we may indulge a passionate affection, and dote upon our illegitimate offspring, our darling guilts or follies, as David did upon that child who was the price of murder and adultery; yet when the "child is dead," it will become us to do as he did, rise from our sullen posture on the earth, and "worship in the house of the Lord" (2 Sam. xii. 20). It will behove us, as he says in another place, to "lay our hand upon our mouth, because it was his doing" (Ps. xxxix. 10); and with holy Job (xl. 4), when charged with his murmurings, "Behold I am vile; what shall I answer? Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea, twice, but I will proceed no farther."

6. Socrates rightly said of contentment, opposing it to the riches of fortune and opinion, that it is the wealth of nature, for it gives every thing that we have learned to want and really need; but reTHE CLOSE.

signation is the riches of grace, bestowing all things that a Christian not only needs but can desire, even Almighty God himself. He, indeed, as the schoolmen teach, is the objective happiness of the creature; he who is the fountain of being must be also of blessedness; and though this be only communicable to us, when we have put off that "flesh which cannot enter into the kingdom of God," and laid aside that "corruption" which cannot "inherit incorruption" (1 Cor. xv. 50), yet even in this life we may make approaches to that blessed state by acts of resignation and denial of ourselves. It was the generous saying of Socrates, being about to die. unto his friend: "O Crito, since it is the will of God, so let it be: Anytus and Melitus may kill me, but cannot hurt me." But such a resignation, as it is infinitely a greater duty to a Christian, so it is also a more firm security. In that case it is not the martyr, but Jesus of Nazareth who is thus persecuted, and he who attacks him will find "it hard to kick against the pricks" (Acts ix. 5).

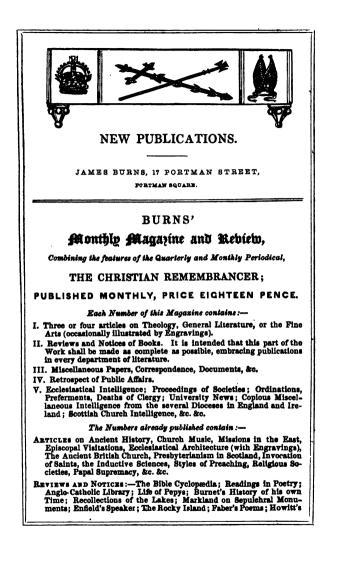
7. There could not be a greater instance of the profligate sensuality of the Israelites than that they murmured for want of "leeks and onions" (Num. xi. 5), when they ate angels' food, and had bread rained down from heaven. It is impossible for the soul that is sensible of God Almighty's favour to repine at any earthly pressure: "The Lord is my shepherd," said David; "therefore can I lack nothing" (Ps. xxiii. 1). And, "thou hast put glad-

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ness into my heart, more than when their corn, and wine, and oil increased" (iv. 7); and in passionate rapture he cries out, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee: my flesh and my heart faileth ; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (Ps. lxxiii. 25). And likewise, "God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trou-Therefore will we not fear, though the earth ble. be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof rage and swell, and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same. If God be in the midst of us, we shall not be removed; he will help us, and that right early" (Ps. xlvi. 1). Let us, therefore, possess ourselves of this support, and, as the prophet advises, "neither fear nor be afraid" in any exigence, how great soever; but "be still and quiet, and sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be our fear, and let him be our dread (Is. viii. 12)."



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